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# A Study of Inactive Main Street Communities

Jennifer Gates

*University of Pennsylvania*

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Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science in Historic Preservation 2005.

Advisor: Randall F. Mason

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# A Study of Inactive Main Street Communities

## **Abstract**

I am very interested in why Main Street communities decided to become inactive. When I was first introduced to the Main Street Program in Oklahoma in 2001, I thought the program an interesting way to help with the preservation of historic buildings while dealing with the future livelihood of these communities. I interned with the Oklahoma Main Street Center for a year as an architectural intern and visited many of the participating communities I had never seen before. I learned quickly that while some communities were very successful others were having a more difficult time. Others, which had been successful, had become stagnant in their efforts. I wondered at the time why this was and how the program could better assist them. Now I wonder if the Main Street Program has come to the end of its useful life and other economic development activities would be more helpful to the communities as long as they did not forget the lessons they learned. Through this problem focus in my Master's Thesis, I hope to better understand why the communities become inactive and if there is a better option for economic development while preserving their historic infrastructure.

## **Comments**

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A STUDY OF INACTIVE MAIN STREET COMMUNITIES

Jennifer Gates

A THESIS

in

Historic Preservation

Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania in  
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE IN HISTORIC PRESERVATION

2005

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## **Preface**

I am very interested in why Main Street communities decide to become inactive. When I was first introduced to the Main Street Program in Oklahoma in 2001, I thought the program an interesting way to help with the preservation of historic buildings while dealing with the future livelihood of these communities. I interned with the Oklahoma Main Street Center for a year as an architectural intern and visited many of the participating communities I had never seen before. I learned quickly that while some communities were very successful others were having a more difficult time. Others, which had been successful, had become stagnant in their efforts. I wondered at the time why this was and how the program could better assist them. Now I wonder if the Main Street Program has come to the end of its useful life and other economic development activities would be more helpful to the communities as long as they did not forget the lessons they learned. Through this problem focus in my Master's Thesis, I hope to better understand why the communities become inactive and if there is a better option for economic development while preserving their historic infrastructure.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to first acknowledge and thank all the questionnaire respondents. Without your responses the findings of this analysis would have been near to impossible. It is your perceptions and knowledge that is not written in files that gives the behind the scenes look at the Main Street organization in your community and state.

I would also like to thank my advisor, Randy Mason and my reader, Todd Scott. Thank you for being critical of my drafts and providing suggestions and questioning sections that were missing concise information. Lastly, I would like to thank my family and friends for supporting me all these years while at the University of Pennsylvania. You understood the stress I was under, especially this last semester. Thanks Dad for being my editor and answering my many questions. Thanks also go to my friend Elizabeth. I do not know what I would have done if I had not had someone else to experience these last three years with.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

The Main Street program is a national approach that assists in the revitalization of historic downtowns through economic redevelopment and historic preservation. What started as a small pilot program in the late 1970s has grown to include over 1,700 communities in 49 states. What is it about the Main Street program that has attracted so many communities to apply for the program? Moreover, once they become a Main Street community, why do some decide to go inactive? While the national program highlights what it determines as positive impacts and successful programs there are still many programs that do not succeed and become “inactive.” Is it due to local constraints, issues with the state requirements, or both? This thesis explores the five main reasons behind why the communities chose to leave the program and how the local, state, and national programs can do to reduce the number going inactive.

To introduce this study, the following section reviews the evolution and current state of the National Main Street Center (NMSC). Chapter 2 sets the problem focus and possible theories of why the programs sometime go inactive. A chapter follows this on the methodology undertaken to complete the study. Chapters 4 and 5 summarize the results of questionnaires completed by local and state Main Street programs about the program details and reasons behind leaving the program. The questionnaire was supplemented by on-site visits and interviews. In Chapter 6, the five main reasons for local programs electing to go inactive are explored in detail. The final chapter recommends actions to contend with programs leaving the program at the local, state, and national levels, followed by some overall conclusions about the local Main Street program.

## **Evolution of Main Street Program**

In the 1970s, the National Trust for Historic Preservation (NTHP) observed a disturbing trend in cities across the country. As shopping centers and other retail establishments increased in number, the historic downtown business districts began to experience economic decline. Consequently, once thriving downtowns began to be abandoned and fall into disrepair. In order to preserve these historic structures and community histories, the NTHP believed it was imperative that this economic trend be reversed.

In 1977, the NTHP started the Main Street Project in three pilot communities to learn why the "...downtowns were dying, identify the factors affecting downtown's health, and develop a comprehensive revitalization strategy to save historic commercial buildings."<sup>1</sup> Over the next three years, the needs of these pilot communities were assessed. The problems within these small downtowns were identified as generic issues rather than having complexity, therefore susceptible to a generic approach to "fixing" them. This approach is not always broad based though that may have been the intention. The recommendations for revitalizing these communities included "...strong public-private partnership; a dedicated organization; a full-time program manager; a commitment to good design; quality promotional programs; and a coordinated, incremental process."<sup>2</sup> These became the foundations of a new national program.

To implement this newly defined program, the National Trust established the National Main Street Center (NMSC) in 1980. Working out of its Washington, D.C.

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<sup>1</sup> National Main Street Center, "History," <http://www.mainstreet.org/content.aspx?page=1807&section=1> (accessed March 6, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

headquarters, they employed the three program managers from the pilot project as the initial NMSC staff. Their objective was to create an organization that would empower states to develop and fund their new program for implementation at the local levels. With the aid of the International Downtown Executives' Association (IDEA) and the Council of State Community Affairs Agencies (CSCAA), NMSC selected six states to be the first in the country to have the program: Colorado, Georgia, Massachusetts, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Texas, who in turn chose five initial communities each. Seeing positive results in all the test communities during the first three years encouraged the NMSC to further expand the program beginning in 1984.<sup>3</sup>

As the program grew, so did the tools NMSC would make available to participating states and communities. In 1985, the NMSC created the Network Membership, a database of all participating members, which enabled communities to more easily share downtown revitalization information. There was a monthly newsletter, *Main Street News*, that also providing important information to participants. The first annual Main Street Conference, National Town Meeting, held in 1986 provided training opportunities, which included user guides and how-to videos.

To further broaden the scope of the program, the NMSC introduced the Urban Demonstration Program in 1985. These programs represented downtown commercial districts and neighborhood business districts in communities with populations greater than 50,000. By 1990, there were 31 states and more than 600 communities participating in the Main Street Program.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

During the 1990s, as the program continued to grow, the NMSC expanded its technical services and information resources even further by taking advantage of new technologies becoming available. Today, there are numerous on-line publications and guides as well as a website and list-serve that provide useful information that assist communities in their Main Street Programs.

With the experience gained over the past twenty-eight years, NMSC believes that they have defined a program that incorporates the necessary elements for a successful downtown revitalization. The results form the basis of a comprehensive approach that covers a range of economic development factors rather than focusing on one. The Main Street Four-Point Approach- the trademark of the program- includes Organization, Promotion, Design, and Economic Restructuring.

### **The Main Street Four-Point Approach and How It Works**

Each of the Four Points become the cornerstones of the local Main Street programs. Organization is a critical component of the program that outlines how communities assemble the essential community business owners, property owners, institutions, and citizens volunteer effort. The Organization Committee coordinates the volunteer and fundraising activities for the program. This committee establishes a work plan, which it implements and keeps track of activities for successes and opportunities for change.

Promotion is used to market the unique assets of the community to residents, business owners, and visitors. This can include advertising, special events, retail promotions, and marketing campaigns to publicize a positive image of the downtown.

With a committee of volunteers to assist in the marketing of the businesses, fundraising and social events, it is thought that the area will begin to see the results of successful revitalization through an increase in retail sales and a revived interest in the community.

Design is an important element to the preservation and improvement of the physical character of the downtown district. The overall appearance makes a strong impression on shoppers and tourists. Maintaining the historical character of the downtown business district while improving the facades and streetscapes helps to create an inviting environment for consumers to walk around and shop. Activities of the design committee may include planning and implementing programs that assist storeowners with rehabilitating their historic building, placing new street furniture, lights, and landscaping. The committee may also create programs that financially or technically assist the Main Street business owners.

Finally, Economic Restructuring involves strengthening the economic well being of the Main Street and identifying the economic goals of the commercial area. The focus of the committee is business recruitment and strengthening the existing enterprises necessary for a thriving corridor. This committee assists the business owners with understanding the market and creating business plans. They also work to recruit new businesses that help generate a balanced mix of goods and services that fill empty storefronts or upper floors.

The National Main Street Center promotes the importance of having each of these four-points as part of a local program. This multi-faceted approach differs from other programs because of its comprehensive structure. Many programs tend to deal with

single-issue concerns. For example, historic preservation is interested most with architecture and physical structures while economic development programs focus primarily on financial aspects. By attempting to address all four aspects simultaneously, NMSC believes the probability of success is increased. The hypothesis that a program's success is due to the equal implementation of the four-points will be discussed later in the paper.

### **State of Main Street Today**

Today, local Main Street programs rely on a strong volunteer base to form the Board of Directors, committees for the Four Points, and the many one-time volunteers needed for special events. One full-time paid program manager is required to be active on the street and assist in the implementation of the goals set out by the Board. As part of being designated a Main Street program the economic data on impacts of the activities undertaken within each community are collected yearly.

The National Trust Main Street Center has tracked the economic impacts to participant community since 1980 as a means of measuring of the program's success. As of 2003, \$18.3 billion of public and private monies have been reinvested in physical improvements in the communities and over 96,000 buildings have been rehabilitated. The average number of dollars reinvested in each community is \$35.17 for every dollar used to operate the local Main Street program. The program has also reportedly assisted in a net gain of over 60,000 businesses and over 244,000 jobs. These quantitative positive impacts of the program have been well documented and publicized by the NMSC.<sup>4</sup> The shortcoming of using only a statistical approach to measure success is that

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<sup>4</sup> National Main Street Center, "Economic Statistics," <http://www.mainstreet.org/content.aspx?page=7966&section=16> (accessed March 6, 2005).

not all economic activity in a community can be attributed solely to the Main Street Program. Many other factors present in a community can also lead to positive results and are more subjective in nature.

Numerous publications over the years have praised the successes of the Main Street program. Every year a “State of Main Street Report” newsletter is sent out to all members that highlight key programs, activities, and businesses of different communities. *Success Stories*, a book published by NMSC, highlights successful programs. These “success stories” were selected for inclusion in the book because they were examples of “well rounded, volunteer driven revitalization initiatives employing the basic principles of the Main Street Approach and achieving long term success and stability.”<sup>5</sup>

More than a few economic indicators are need determine the long-term success and stability of a community. There could easily be other unmeasured economic and subjective factors occurring in a community that could also be key contributing factors to their improvement. More comprehensive research into these other factors would be needed to gain a more complete picture. These statistical measures also leave unanswered how other communities, both with and with out Main Street programs, compare in their efforts. Greater results may have been achievable under another type of program. The absence of comprehensive research into why communities cease to participate in the Main Street Program, and what activities occur outside of the program is the focus of this study.

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<sup>5</sup> Douglas A. Loescher, introduction to *Main Street Success Stories*, by Suzanne Dane, 2.

## **Problem Focus**

There are a number of inactive Main Street communities that have left the program before they “graduate,” yet there are few analyses into the reasons behind these communities, decision to not participate. With all the documented positive results from Main Street, there is little evidence that NMSC has explored in-depth why communities have become inactive, let alone the total number that have gone inactive. Some states are beginning to assess why the communities have left Main Street but most have not. These states have experienced at least a quarter of their programs going inactive. These inactive communities could have left for a myriad of reasons relating to the program’s shortcomings. This thesis explores why some Main Street Programs fail and seeks to understand more fully the level of success Main Street communities have achieved.

A representative sample of state Main Street programs and associated inactive local communities were examined for this study. This information will provide the national and state programs a better understanding of how to evaluate their programs. It will also better assist both current and future community understanding of what is necessary to build a successful program of revitalization.

## **Theories for Community Program Failure**

From my first-hand knowledge and experience working with a state Main Street Program, I propose three possible theories as to why some programs “fail” and become inactive. First is a community’s inability to unite behind the program and assemble the necessary financial and human resources. Second is the inflexibility of the program’s structure to meet the particular needs of a community. Lastly, a community’s



unrealistically high expectations for a “quick fix” that ultimately leads to disappointment when not achieved immediately.

At the local level, for a program to succeed there needs to be stable leadership and a continuous supply of volunteers that see the potential benefit to the community. People by nature have differing opinions as to what is best for their community and downtown business district. Consequently, it is often difficult to arrive at a consensus as to the program’s objectives or priorities. Because this program is primarily based on volunteer participation, from the board of directors and committees to the occasional event, it is essential that they have a common sense of purpose and unrelenting dedication.

A community’s failure to understand the requirements of becoming a Main Street community or the structure of their program inhibits their success. While NMSC has elected to treat all communities the same, most have very different dynamics such as political nature and financial stability. A program’s adaptability to the needs of the community is essential. Conflicts between the state’s program requirements and the community’s ability to adhere to them may not have been recognized prior to accepting the program.

The most commonly held theory as to why communities become disenchanted with the program is that the communities were looking for a “quick fix.” The program is designed as a long-term, ongoing effort. It is difficult to keep volunteers motivated in the activities especially if their expectation was fast, significant results.

To validate these theories, six communities in two states, together with their state

Main Street offices, were selected to participate in this research.

## **Methodology**

To answer the question of why local Main Street programs become inactive, a representative sample of state Main Street programs and a subset of their inactive local communities were selected for further examination. The research was divided into phases from a review of available data, selecting what to analyze and the actual analysis of the states and communities.

### State/Community Selection

The first phase was to select which state and local programs to investigate. The state programs were chosen to reflect a variety of program types; how they are organized and funded, the number of active and inactive communities, their reinvestment statistics, and their location. Due to my knowledge of the Oklahoma Main Street Program and my current residence in Pennsylvania, I narrowed my selection to these two states. These states reflect major differences in program organization, their geographic location, and history.

From these two states, information was gathered on all inactive communities. Based on their population size, the number of years active and the reinvestment statistics, three communities from each state were selected for greater in-depth research. They represent an inner-city program, a suburban program, and a rural program. These program types represent the different characteristics and issues found in communities of different sizes and location in proximity to a metropolitan area.

The communities in Oklahoma are Automobile Alley (inner-city example), Sand Springs (suburban example), and Chickasha (rural example). The communities in Pennsylvania are Fairhill (inner-city example), Township of Abington (suburban example), and Mansfield Borough (rural example). Together these communities represent a diverse range of characteristics with varied experiences within the Main Street program and reflect as comprehensive a study of Main Street Program failures as would be possible within the parameters of a Masters thesis project.<sup>6</sup>

#### Questionnaires, Site Visits, Interviews

The next phase of research included a combination of both qualitative and quantitative research techniques. Since the data available for the Main Street Programs were primarily statistical in nature, it was necessary to develop a questionnaire, conduct site visits and interviews in order to gain the needed community perspective on why their programs went inactive. Two different questionnaires were created, one for the state Main Street program personnel and one for local volunteers and officials involved in the local program. (See Appendix A: Questionnaire Recipients and Respondents)

The state questionnaire was divided into the following sections: questions regarding background information on the respondent, the background of the state program, and their perceptions of the three inactive communities. Questionnaires were sent to the staff members affiliated with the state programs that were either familiar with

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<sup>6</sup> To complete a more thorough analysis, all the inactive communities programs should be sent questionnaires in each of the states. The number of questionnaires per community should also grow to include diverse perspectives on the strengths and weaknesses of the main street program. Depending on the role the person played in the program may color their responses get more than one perspective. In addition to questionnaire data, it would also be important to look at the economic impact the program had during its active status. This would require an extensive economic study utilizing regional economic development models, which is well beyond the scope and focus of this study. This would allow a comparison to be drawn between perceived and actual change in the community.

these communities or could provide the needed information. Out of 11 state questionnaires sent, six were returned, three in Oklahoma and three in Pennsylvania. (See Appendix B: Questionnaire for State Programs)

The local questionnaire became the primary source of data, due to the lack of historical program data retained by the inactive communities; many records were moved to storage or destroyed and therefore unavailable. The questionnaire was divided into sections that dealt with information on the respondent, the respondent's perspective, the local program and current economic development related activities to see if the Main Street efforts have continued, changed or been discontinued altogether. These questionnaires were sent to local community officials, chambers of commerce, ex-program managers, and/or citizens who were involved with the program. Locating the appropriate people within each of these communities was difficult since many of those involved had moved away, leaving few who knew the reasons behind going inactive. Out of 19 questionnaires sent, six were returned, three in Oklahoma and three in Pennsylvania. At least one was returned from each community with the exception of the Main Street program in the Fairhill neighborhood, run by the Hispanic Association of Contractors and Enterprises. (See Appendix C: Questionnaire for Community Programs)

During this time, I also visited each of the communities to get a first-hand look at the activity occurring in their downtown. I documented the Main Street areas and this opportunity to casually discuss the program with business owners in the area. I also followed up the questionnaires with interviews if questions were left unanswered or if I needed more information.

### Analysis

The final phase of research involved the analysis of the collected data, drawing conclusions about the theories of failure outlined previously, and the recommendations based on that analysis. The strengths and weaknesses of each program, the characteristics of the community that could impact the livelihood of the program, as well as other issues that impeded their progress in the program were identified. The relative complexity of the Main Street program was also considered when evaluating the continued use of this economic development strategy over other comparable programs. The local program's relationship with the state and national programs is also of interest and potentially played a role in the decision to become inactive. The recommendations, based on the analysis, are intended to aid the national, state, and local Main Street programs in creating a more sustainable program.

## Chapter 2: Summary Review of State Program Findings

While the local Main Street programs are the focus of this thesis, it is important to understand the role of their state Main Street offices in assisting them. State Main Street offices strongly influence the make-up of local programs due to highly restrictive program guidelines and the fact they are the main source of technical assistance, training, and information. The state programs also serve as a link between the communities and with the National Main Street Center. The staff and budget to assist the local programs varies within each state. According to the NMSC, “[t]he average State Main Street coordinating program budget is \$508,224, with an average staff size of 3.09 full-time and 1.64 part-time staff serving an average of 30.11 local Main Street programs.”<sup>7</sup> The state programs are housed within either a larger state agency or private non-profit organization.

The NMSC has defined the characteristics that they feel are needed to create a strong state program. State programs should:

- Respond to and meet the needs of local Main Street programs;
- Build a network of local Main Street programs that exhibit a high reinvestment ratio which increases incrementally each year;
- Have a high percentage of local Main Street programs that remain active over time;
- Embody a strong preservation ethic and successfully preserve and protect historic Main Street buildings and other relevant historic resources;
- Garner resources from both the public and private sectors to revitalize historic and traditional commercial districts;
- Employ an adequate number of staff members who provide basic services to communities and help them create local programs that effectively use all four points of the Main Street approach;

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<sup>7</sup> National Main Street Center, “Statewide Coordinating Programs,” <http://www.mainstreet.org/content.aspx?page=2236&section=15> (accessed March 6, 2005).

- Develop and maintain a high level of positive visibility and credibility within their jurisdictions (state, city, or region);
- Garner bi-partisan political support in the jurisdiction's executive and legislative levels;
- Obtain adequate and stable funding from multiple public and private sector sources;
- Positively shape policies and legislation to support the revitalization of traditional commercial districts and the preservation of historic Main Street buildings;
- Encourage local Main Street programs to evolve and mature; and
- Expand and evolve to address progressively more complex revitalization issues.<sup>8</sup>

This is an exhaustive list and brings into question if there are any states that meet all of these criteria. While not unreasonable to strive for, in actuality not all state programs have the resources to achieve these goals. An important missing characteristic is the expertise of the state staff. A strong state program should have at least some of these criteria as well as a strong support staff that is able to understand and relate to the communities needs. The most successful state programs would be able to offer a diverse forms of assistance that meet the needs of a community without straining their own resources. The following section is a summary of the findings from the questionnaire in the two state programs in Oklahoma and Pennsylvania.

## **Oklahoma**

In Oklahoma, the county governments are more powerful than municipalities, in general. In each county, there is a county seat where many decisions are made but most cities have their own city council and mayor form of government. Today, Oklahoma contains 77 counties within 69,903 square miles. The state population increased to 3.5

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<sup>8</sup> National Main Street Center, "Coordinating Programs," <http://www.mainstreet.org/content.aspx?page=2287&section=15> (accessed March 6, 2005).

million in 2000.<sup>9</sup> The majority of this population is located within the two metropolitan areas, Oklahoma City and Tulsa. Of the population, the majority is white with the next highest race being Native American. (See Table 1: 2000 State Demographic Statistics Below)

State	Statehood	# of Counties	Size (sq. mi.)	2000 Population	Percent Change 1990-2000	Largest Race	2nd Largest Race
Oklahoma	1907	77	69,903	3,450,654	9%	White 76%	Native American 8%
Pennsylvania	1787	67	44,817	12,281,054	3%	White 85%	African American 10%

*Table 1: 2000 State Demographic Statistics*

What was once primarily an agrarian economy, moved into oil and gas exploration/production followed by major industries. The major industries include transportation equipment, machinery, and electric and rubber products.<sup>10</sup> The major agricultural economy is in wheat, ranking fourth in the nation, and cattle and calf, also ranking fourth.<sup>11</sup> Oklahoma also is the third largest natural gas-producing state in the nation.<sup>12</sup> Of the population 16 years and over, 62% are in the labor force. The median household income is \$33,400, while the per capita income is \$17,646. Of the population, 14% are individuals below the poverty level.<sup>13</sup> (See Table 2: 2000 State Economic Statistics Below)

<sup>9</sup> US Census Bureau's official Web site, "Oklahoma Census Quick Facts," <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/40000.html> (accessed March 9, 2005).

<sup>10</sup> 50 States and Capitals, "Oklahoma," <http://www.50states.com/oklahoma.htm> (accessed March 9, 2005).

<sup>11</sup> Oklahoma's official Web site, "Oklahoma State History and Information," <http://www.state.ok.us/osfdocs/stinfo2.html> (accessed March 9, 2005).

<sup>12</sup> See note 10 above.

<sup>13</sup> See note 9 above.



<b>State</b>	<b>% in Labor Force</b>	<b>Median Household Income</b>	<b>Per Capita Income</b>	<b>% Below the Poverty Level</b>
Oklahoma	62%	\$33,400	\$17,646	14%
Pennsylvania	62%	\$40,106	\$20,880	11%

*Table 2: 2000 State Economic Statistics*

### Main Street in Oklahoma

With the movement of the rural population into the metropolitan areas, many small towns are in need of the many economic and community development efforts undertaken by the Oklahoma Department of Commerce. One of these efforts is the Main Street program. The Oklahoma Main Street Center (OMSC) was started in 1985 and is funded by state taxes appropriated by the state legislature specifically for OMSC. In 2004, the state appropriated \$608,000 to pay the staff and to provide program assistance. Since 1986, reinvestment statistics have been maintained for the 58 communities that have participated in the program. As of 2005, there has been an investment of \$410,973,054 in public and private monies and 2,635 buildings rehabilitated. The program has also assisted in a net gain of over 2,909 businesses and over 9,347 jobs<sup>14</sup> with the defined downtown business districts.

There are currently 38 active and 20 inactive programs. Within the last 20 years 34% of the communities have gone inactive after an average of 4.7 years. Every year the state office receives three to five applications of which only one to three are accepted depending on the number of active communities, availability of staff and the quality of the application. The application process includes attending an application workshop, a

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<sup>14</sup> Oklahoma Department of Commerce, "Main Street Program Overview," <http://www.okcommerce.gov/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=345&Itemid=442> (accessed March 9, 2005).

letter of intent, and the appropriate application. There are three applications, each correspond to the population size of the community. This application process is representative of one way in which the program has adapted to the variety of communities applying to the program. These applications require slide images of the community, letters of support from the city and other stakeholders, notarized certification of first-year funding, articles of incorporation for the host organization, map with boundaries, and detailed answers to what the community hopes to achieve from the program. The communities are selected by an "...independent group of 'advisors' with input by the state staff. These are then forwarded to the Secretary of Commerce and Tourism who has the final decision.”<sup>15</sup>

Seven full-time employees and one intern staff the OMSC. There is a Main Street Director, an architect, a management consultant, interior designer, an energy grant administrator, and one executive administrative assistant. Five of the staff members also serve as “liaisons” to communities based on geographic location. The staff provides “organizational and promotional training, committee and board development and volunteer development training, design assistance, economic restructuring training, and one-on-one design and business consultations.”<sup>16</sup> The OMSC office also provides Design Works to non Main Street communities. This two-day workshop dealing with the Design Point, which provides technical assistance to communities by identifying their physical assets and building upon them to improve their physical image.

The OMSC advertises the Main Street program in many ways. On the Department of Commerce website there are web pages about the Main Street program. A

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<sup>15</sup> Ronald H. Frantz, Jr., questionnaire response, March 2005.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

description of the program and services is viewed along with links to descriptions of the Main Street Approach and the Reinvestment Statistics of the program overall. These cumulative statistics include the inactive programs. A profile of an active Main Street community is also highlighted on the main page. A list of participating communities and their contact information is available, which lists those programs that have gone inactive. The OMSC also holds an annual awards banquet and participates in the Statewide Preservation Conference. Four times a year the office also publishes a newsletter offering information to the communities highlighting special projects, and listing upcoming events.

When asked in the questionnaire what the strengths and weaknesses of the OMSC were, the state staff very similar responses. Their strengths included network for information sharing, long-term commitment to the communities, consistency of standards and funding, as well as the longevity of the program and completed detailed annual work plan. The main weakness includes the lack of available staff to provide the necessary assistance needed as the number of communities grow. While the state program is organized around the services they provide the community, the shortage of staff sometimes limit the ability to meet all the needs of the communities, especially those that are experiencing difficulties.

The relationship between the Oklahoma Main Street Center and the National Trust Main Street Center was also a queried on the questionnaire. According to the replies, the OMSC works with National Trust Main Street Center on a contractual basis to provide technical assistance. One of the questionnaire respondents stated that the relationship is very good between the state and national programs. There are regional

representatives as well as contractors that provide some of the technical assistance and trainings in the localities. Both the state staff and local program managers attend the NMSC annual conference as a requirement of being part of the program. A wider array of needs can be addressed by having both the state and national programs involved in assisting the communities.

## **Pennsylvania**

Unlike Oklahoma, Pennsylvania counties each have a county seat government that primarily serves for informational or guidance purposes. Those communities that have adopted the Home Rule Charter have more control over what laws are passed in their community. Today, Pennsylvania contains 67 counties within 44,817 square miles.<sup>17</sup> The population has increased a small amount from 1990 to just over 12 million in 2000.<sup>18</sup> The population is dispersed throughout the state but the two largest cities are Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. White consists of the highest proportion of the total population with African Americans being the next highest. (See Table 1: 2000 State Demographic Statistics on Page 16)

The strongest sectors of the economy in Pennsylvania have changed and diversified with developing technologies. Still today, farming of a variety of crops and dairy is still one of the major economies in the state. Mining and steel production is still a large part of the economy but the largest employer is in the manufacturing and production of pharmaceuticals and chemicals, food products, and electronic equipment.<sup>19</sup> Another major source of state revenue is the tourist industry. Many sites of national

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<sup>17</sup> Infoplease, "Pennsylvania History," <http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0108264.html> (accessed March 9, 2005).

<sup>18</sup> US Census Bureau's official Web site, "Pennsylvania Census Quick Facts," <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/42000.html> (accessed March 9, 2005).

<sup>19</sup> See note 17 above.

importance located in the state are heavily visited. Of the population 16 years and over, 62% are in the labor force. The median household income is \$40,106, while the per capita income is \$20,880. Of the population, 11% are individuals below the poverty level. (See Table 2: 2000 State Economic Statistics on Page 17) For those communities losing population as well as those gaining population that wish to retain their identity, there are many economic and community development efforts undertaken by the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development. The Main Street program is a part of this state effort.

#### Main Street in Pennsylvania

The Pennsylvania Main Street program was one of the founding programs and began in 1980. In 2004, \$7 million was appropriated by the state legislature to pay for Main Street related grants. Unlike most states, Pennsylvania provides funding directly to the communities to offset some of the costs of starting and maintaining the program for a short period. Pennsylvania provides \$175,000 over a five-year period to assist the local programs in paying for a full-time program manager and \$120,000 for façade improvement grants. The Main Street program is organized and managed by the Department of Community and Economic Development's (DCED) Office of Community Development in partnership with the Pennsylvania Downtown Center (PDC), a statewide non-profit organization. While the DCED selects the communities and provides the financial assistance, the PDC provides the training and technical assistance to the communities on a contractual basis with the Commonwealth.

Since 1980, approximately 120 communities have participated in the program. There are currently 63 active and about 50 inactive programs, many of which have

graduated after five years in the program. Over the past 24 years, 44% of the communities have chosen wither not to finish with the Main Street Grant program or continue to work with the DCED. This high percentage further supports the need to assess the reasons why certain programs decide to not participate any longer. The reinvestment statistics have been recorded yearly since its inception, but are not accumulated. During the 2003 calendar year, there has been an investment of \$64 million in public and private monies and 438 buildings rehabilitated. The program has also assisted in a net gain of over 326 businesses and over 1,110 jobs<sup>20</sup> within the 63 active programs.

Every year the state office receives five to ten applications of which only five are accepted. The application applies to all programs and assistance offered by the Department of Community and Economic Development. To be a Main Street community, an incorporated non-profit organization must be established with a mission, vision, and by-laws organization to oversee the implementation and activities of the manager. To receive the funds, a five-year strategy, market assessment, image development, long-term fundraising plan, and design guidelines must be completed within the first year. The internal staff of the DCED selects the communities. “[P]riority is given to communities that have a viable central business district with potential for improvement; a strong downtown organization that holds a vested interest in the project's success; and a clear local commitment to community and economic development as well as historic preservation.”<sup>21</sup> At the completion of the five years, the organization is eligible for a “program exit allocation” which provides more funds. After

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<sup>20</sup> Diana Kerr, 2003 Reinvestment Statistics, unpublished data.

<sup>21</sup> Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development, “Main Street Program,” [http://www.newpa.com/program\\_1.html](http://www.newpa.com/program_1.html) (accessed March 9, 2005).

10 years, the community would be eligible for Main Street re-designation.

Employees of both the DCED and PDC staff the Pennsylvania Main Street program and are divided between the central and five regional offices. They complete site reviews, analysis and recommendations for ongoing projects. They also manage all the grant programs offered by the office. The six staff members at the PDC provide a variety of technical assistance that is "...tailored to a community's unique needs."<sup>22</sup> There is an Executive Director, support services coordinator, two regional program services coordinators, a special projects coordinator, and one executive administrative assistant. It is uncertain whether the shared program responsibilities create undue difficulties in managing the program, but an assumption could be made that with the more parties involved the more chances for differing opinions on how the program should be managed.

The DCED provides several grant programs that are related to the Main Street program but do not always fit the main NMSC criteria to be designated a Main Street Community. Communities with populations of less than 3,000, too few businesses, or lack of financial resources, are not precluded from receiving a grant and utilizing the Four-Point Approach. The Elm Street program, Anchor Building grants, Main Street Achiever, and Downtown Reinvestment Grants are examples of these programs. This is an example of how Pennsylvania has adapted the program requirements to further assist a wider range of communities but the services have not significantly changed between the different grants. All these grants have specific criteria based on the NMSC principles.

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<sup>22</sup> Pennsylvania Downtown Center, "Programs and Services," <http://www.padowntown.org/about/program.asp> (accessed March 6, 2005).

All the programs offered by the DCED and PDC are well advertised by their respective organizations. The PDC holds an annual conference where it presents “Townie Awards” to the participating communities. Both organizations have websites that provide descriptions of the programs and assistance offered. A community can apply to the Main Street Program on the DCED Main Street program web page. While the DCED website is centered more around their numerous grant programs, the PDC offers information more specific to the Main Street Approach. The PDC website also contains descriptions of their staff and lists all PDC membership communities.

According to the questionnaire response received from the DCED, the strengths of the Pennsylvania Main Street program were the availability of the administrative dollars, main street structure, and local control. The weaknesses include the local perception that it is a “grant program” that has a beginning and an end as opposed to a process and a continuing need in the community.

The relationship between the Pennsylvania Main Street program and the National Trust Main Street Center was also a subject on the questionnaire. According to the questionnaire reply, the relationship is “friendly” but there has not been a contract since 1982. The PDC buys annually the NMSC’s Coordinator’s package from the National Trust and attends regular State Coordinator’s meetings. The staffs of the DCED and PDC are encouraged to attend the NMSC annual conference. While there is no formal relationship between the state and national organization the national organization still recognize the existence of the state office and provides contact information on their website for interested communities.



## State Program Comparison

The differences between the state programs in Oklahoma and Pennsylvania rest primarily in their structure and the type of assistance they provide to the local programs. While Oklahoma is positioned in a centralized office in the state capital with only state employees dedicated to the program, Pennsylvania has regional offices with staff that work on many different programs. Instead of all the services being provided “in-house” as part of a single organization like Oklahoma, Pennsylvania contracts out the technical assistance to the PDC creating multiple points of contact for the respective communities. (See Table 3: State Program Comparison Below)

State	Founded	No. Active Programs	No. Inactive Programs	No. of Full Time Staff	Other Programs	Strengths	Weaknesses
Oklahoma	1985	38	20	5	Yes	Network of information sharing, long-term commitment, consistency of standards and funding	Lack of staff
Pennsylvania	1980	63	50	~ 7*	Yes	Availability of funding, structure	Perception that it is a grant program

\* There are an additional 6 fulltime staff through the contract with the PDC.

*Table 3: State Program Comparison*

Another important distinction between these two state programs is that Pennsylvania provides a grant to the communities accepted into the Main Street program, while no money is provided to local Oklahoma Main Street programs. However, both states do require that the communities have proof of needed funds based on their particular program before they can use the Main Street designation. While both find strengths in the structure, the weaknesses that are identified clarify how closely they look at their program. The Oklahoma identifies their weakness on an internal level while

Pennsylvania identifies theirs on an external perception. The weaknesses are not easily amended without changing the structure or funding of the state program. (See Table 4: State Program Reinvestment Statistics Comparison Below)

<b>State</b>	<b>Total Investment*</b>	<b>No. of Buildings Rehabilitated*</b>	<b>Net Gain in Businesses*</b>	<b>Net Gain in Jobs*</b>
Oklahoma	\$410,973,054	2635	2909	9347
Pennsylvania	\$64,000,000	438	326	1,110

\* Statistics in Pennsylvania were only available for 2003 Fiscal Year.

*Table 4: State Program Reinvestment Statistics Comparison*

### Chapter 3: Summary Review of Local Program Findings

The Main Street program is designed to assist in the revitalization of commercial districts of small communities that are facing depopulation and economic loss. There are many revitalization programs designed to help small communities. Why do communities choose the Main Street program over others? What happens internally that leads some of these programs into deciding to go inactive? To understand the local program it is important to first understand how the dynamics and structure of the program locally and their relationship with the state programs.

How a local program is administered and where it receives its funding can contribute to the success or failure of any program. In 2000, the NMSC completed a survey of local Main Street programs to better understand the structure of their programs. Of the programs that completed the survey, the majority were “affiliated with state or citywide program” (90%), a part of a government agency (17%), and receiving the majority of their public sector funding from city grants (38%) and general funds (42%) and private sector funding from memberships (72%) and special events and sales (67%).<sup>23</sup> Though this may be the case, the National Main Street Center still encourages the establishment of “...an independent, private nonprofit organization whose express purpose is to revitalize the commercial district.”<sup>24</sup> This structure would provide a successful model because it would allow for a relationship with city hall without being caught up in local politics. A successful local program should also be able to generate and maintain the interest of the business and property owners, while knowing that it is

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<sup>23</sup> National Main Street Center, “Main Street Census Report,” <http://nthp.grndot.com/content.aspx?page=5188&section=3> (accessed March 6, 2005).

<sup>24</sup> National Main Street Center, “Successful Organizational Models,” <http://www.mainstreet.org/content.aspx?page=3329&section=2> (accessed March 6, 2005).

impossible to please everyone. Finally, a successful program will need financial stability and community support to sustain the program. The following section is an analysis of the inactive local Main Street programs in Oklahoma and Pennsylvania.

### **Oklahoma Inactive Local Programs**

In Oklahoma, 20 programs have gone inactive since its inception in 1984. While some of these program went inactive after only a few years, others left after more than 10 years of being active. There are many possible reasons why a local program goes inactive. One of these reasons is that the programs lacked the financial or physical resources to sustain the program. Automobile Alley®, Sand Springs, and Chickasha were the cities chosen for further study because of their demographic diversity (See Table 5: 2000 Oklahoma Communities' Demographic Statistics and Table 6: 2000 Oklahoma Communities' Economic Statistics Below), and because they were active at different periods of time, which provided greater insight into the program.

<b>State</b>	<b>City</b>	<b>Founded</b>	<b>Size (sq. mi.)</b>	<b>2000 Population</b>	<b>Percent Change 1990-2000</b>	<b>Largest Race</b>	<b>2nd Largest Race</b>
Oklahoma	Automobile Alley (Oklahoma City Statistical Data)	1890	607	506,000	13%	White 68%	African American 15%
	Sand Springs	1912	39	17,451	12%	White 85%	Native American 7%
	Chickasha	1892	18	15,850	5%	White 81%	African American 8%

*Table 5: 2000 Oklahoma Community Demographic Statistics*

		<b>% in Labor Force</b>	<b>Median Household Income</b>	<b>Per Capita Income</b>	<b>% Below the Poverty Level</b>
<b>State</b>	<b>City</b>				
Oklahoma	Automobile Alley (Oklahoma City Statistical Data)	64%	\$34,947	\$19,098	16%
	Sand Springs	65%	\$40,380	\$18,193	9%
	Chickasha	57%	\$26,369	\$14,797	18%

*Table 6: 2000 Oklahoma Community Economic Statistics*

### Automobile Alley®

Automobile Alley® is a business district located in Oklahoma City, the capital of Oklahoma. To the east are the State Capital buildings and to the south is downtown. (See Images 1 and 2 on Page 30) The city form of government is an elected Mayor and Council who set policy with an appointed Manager who carries out the operations. Today Oklahoma City is located within 607 square miles and is part of a larger metropolitan statistical area. The population within Oklahoma City has grown to 506,000 in 2000. The population is mostly white with the next highest race being African American.<sup>25</sup> (See Table 5: 2000 Oklahoma Communities' Demographic Statistics on Page 28)

The economy in Oklahoma City has changed over the past 100 years as the city grew into a metropolitan area. Incorporated in 1890, it became the capital in 1910 due to the extension of the railroad. In 1928, oil was discovered in the city, and quickly became

<sup>25</sup> US Census Bureau's official Web site, "Oklahoma City, Ok Census Quick Facts," <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/40/4055000.html> (accessed March 16, 2005).



Image 1: View of Broadway Avenue looking south towards downtown Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.



Image 2: Looking north along Broadway Avenue.

one of the major industries. Today, the city is a major wholesale and distributing center as well as contains one of the largest cattle stockyards in the world.<sup>26</sup> One of the major employers in the city is Tinker Air Force Base. Of the population 16 years and over, 64% are in the labor force. The median household income is \$34,947, while the per capita income is \$19,098. Of the population, 16% are individuals below the poverty level.<sup>27</sup> (See Table 6: 2000 Oklahoma Communities' Economic Statistics on Page 29)

Located along Broadway Avenue, Automobile Alley, a National Historic District, is as old as the city itself. It runs from 4<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> Street on Broadway and one block west of Broadway to I-235 to the east. This street, once a residential area, gave way to businesses, hotels and apartment buildings during the 1910s and 1920s. The one to three story brick and concrete buildings were built for auto dealerships and service shops. Closer to the railroad, larger warehouse and manufacturing buildings were constructed. During the 1950s and 1960s, the creation of the interstate highway system would assist in the economic decline of the area along with the populations moving out of the inner city.<sup>28</sup> While most of the commercial structures remain along Broadway, many of the smaller businesses and homes have been demolished for industrial areas. This area, already in a state of decline, was affected even more by the bombing of the Murrah Federal Building in 1995, which led to the creation of the Main Street program in 1996. (See Images 3 and 4 on Page 32)

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<sup>26</sup> Infoplease, "Oklahoma City, Ok," <http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0108575.html> (accessed March 16, 2005).

<sup>27</sup> See note 25 above.

<sup>28</sup> Automobile Alley® Historic District, "History," <http://www.automobilealley.com/history.html> (accessed March 16, 2005).



Image 3: Automobile Alley after the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995.



Image 4: Renovated historic automobile dealerships along Broadway Avenue in Automobile Alley, Oklahoma.



### *The Program*

The then Mayor of Oklahoma City, Ron Norick, commissioned a task force to study the area around the bombing site and make recommendations for revitalizing the blighted areas. The revitalization of Automobile Alley® commercial district became the focus in conjunction with its Main Street designation. Ron Franz, the architect at the state Main Street office, first brought the program to the attention of the district. One of the reasons for applying to the Main Street program was for the “structure it provided.”<sup>29</sup> Before the Main Street program there had been nothing that provided a turnkey solution for revitalizing a downtown business district, only a few individuals working independently. They were all supportive of the idea.<sup>30</sup> The goals in revitalizing this gateway to downtown included creating a space for people to live and work downtown and restore the “significant” buildings.

The program was set up with two full time employees, board of directors and the four committees that relate to the Four Point Approach. It was incorporated as a non-profit 501(C) 3 organization that reinvested \$30 million in public and private monies over the course of its 3 years of active status.<sup>31</sup> The main financial supporters were major corporations in and near the district, while around 70% of the businesses located within the district participated in committees, meetings, and social events.<sup>32</sup> Automobile Alley® developed a logo, advertised all meetings, and hosted monthly social events to advertise the program. A website was also maintained to promote the district.

As part of the contract with the state office, all reinvestment statistics are

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<sup>29</sup> Meg Salyer, questionnaire response, March 2005.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> James Watters, Reinvestment Statistics, unpublished data.

<sup>32</sup> See note 29 above.

maintained annually. During the life of the program, \$3.7 million has been invested in 18 façade renovations, and another \$20 million on other rehabilitations. The majority of the physical improvements were undertaken through funds allotted from the federal government to improve the streetscape due to the destruction of the bombing. These improvements included new trees, street furniture, lighting, and street intersection design. With a grant from the Kirkpatrick Foundation, the Automobile Alley® banners were purchased and displayed on street light poles. There is a visible difference between the district and its surrounding streetscapes. During the program's activity, 33 new businesses opened and 72 new jobs were created.<sup>33</sup> Automobile Alley® was able to acquire the necessary funds to create a visible impact which potentially influenced the impact seen in the increase in businesses and jobs.

The 15-18 Board of Directors of the Main Street program in Automobile Alley® were comprised mostly of business and property owners within the district. Many members had economic development and financial experience but were extremely busy.<sup>34</sup> Though they met monthly, in between meetings not a lot was accomplished due to their personal obligations. Their role, as defined in the survey response, was to create the vision, fundraise, and promote the district. The program manager, "Executive Director," was a full time position hired and managed by the Board of Directors. The job of the manager was to carry out the daily operations, oversee the committee activities, and prepare reports to the state office, with the assistance of an administrative assistant. There were three program managers over the short period the program was in existence. The change in managers provided new styles and approach to the program but also

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<sup>33</sup> See note 31 above.

<sup>34</sup> See note 29 above.

presented the problem of a “loss of continuity.”<sup>35</sup> The first manager had participated in three other local Main Street programs. The strengths of the managers were their communication skills and their belief in the program and its goals. This enabled them to interact well with the business owners and volunteers from the community. However, their administrative skills were a weakness, which prevented them from executing the day-to-day requirements necessary to advance the program to its full potential.<sup>36</sup>

A committee was set up for each of the Four Points according to the Main Street process. These committees were comprised of people representative of the district as well as containing expertise, such as an architect on the design committee and a non-profit CEO on the organization committee. The members of the committee were committed and met monthly. To assist in the committees and carryout the special events in Automobile Alley®, around 30 volunteers were recruited from the local businesses and family members. The volunteers were from a range of backgrounds and were between 30 and 50 years of age. This means there were few participants within the surrounding neighborhood who were active in the organization but likely participated in some of the events. Over the life of the program the number of volunteers steadily decreased for most events with one exception, the annual fundraising Valentine’s Day dessert party “Chocolate Decadence.” This event along with the Employee Day has occurred yearly since 1998.

As part of the contract with the state office, training and assistance are provided to all local communities. Automobile Alley felt that the trainings were the most beneficial while the business development services were the least. “For the most part,” Meg Salyer,

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

a former Board Member of the Main Street and current Board member of Downtown OKC, Inc., felt that the assistance met their expectations. The design assistance was probably seen as valuable when looking at the number of renderings completed for building/business owners that were implemented in the district. They did utilize all Four Points of the program. The National Trust Main Street Center also provided services that the local program brought in to speak on specific topics. Some members also went to the National Conference.

In 2000, Automobile Alley became an inactive program when it joined with four other commercial districts in Oklahoma City to form Downtown OKC, Inc., a government defined Business Improvement District (BID). The primary reason for abandoning Main Street was the lack of funds needed to maintain the organizational structure dictated by the state office. The cost of maintaining two full-time employees was prohibitive and was not thought of as a “good use of funds.”<sup>37</sup> According to Meg Salyer, “[t]here was no flexibility with the staff requirements... Our experience was overall very positive and it was a disappointment and [point of] frustration of the board...”<sup>38</sup> When a program has many activities requiring funds, a decision has to be made about where the funds should go. Automobile Alley chose a more financially feasible route by joining with the other commercial districts. Now as a part of Downtown OKC, Inc. the staff is shared among all the districts and as a BID they now have access to special funding. If the program had been flexible in their requirements, Automobile Alley may have still been a Main Street today. Their efforts in the district have continued and economic conditions of the district have “improved substantially” and are seen as

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

more “vibrant” today.<sup>39</sup>

Despite the move to Downtown OKC, Inc., elements of Main Street remain. The Automobile Alley® district still operates with a volunteer board and four committees mirroring the Four Point Approach of which Design and Promotion are the most active. The main fundraiser for the year is still the “Chocolate Decadence” Valentines Day party. Meg Salyer believes that “...all involved would credit the participation in the Main Street Program with much of the great success we have had.”<sup>40</sup> It provided them with a framework and a base for which they have carried over into another economic development effort.

### Sand Springs

Sand Springs is located just 6 miles west of downtown Tulsa in Oklahoma along Highway 64. This Tulsa suburb was incorporated in 1912 and operates under a council-manager form of government since the City Charter change adopted in 1969. The City Manager is appointed by the City Council to handle the daily operations, management, and the implementation of the policies set by the City Council. Today, Sand Springs consists of 19 square miles of incorporated land with an additional 20 square miles available for growth.<sup>41</sup> In 2000, the population of the city was 17,451, an increase from 1990. Of the population, the majority is white with the next highest race being Native American.<sup>42</sup> (See Table 5: See Table 5: 2000 Oklahoma Communities’ Demographic Statistics on Page 28)

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> City of Sand Springs’ official Web site, <http://www.ci.sand-springs.ok.us> (accessed March 16, 2005).

<sup>42</sup> US Census Bureau’s official Web site, “Sand Springs, Ok Census Quick Facts,” <http://censtats.census.gov/data/OK/1604065300.pdf> (accessed March 16, 2005).

Founded in 1908 by Charles Page, a pioneer oilman, “with a vision of building a community promoting family living with a powerful and diverse industrial base.”<sup>43</sup> Today, there are 52 industries and over 600 small businesses.<sup>44</sup> The two largest employers in the city are Wal-Mart and the Sand Springs school system. Of the population 16 years and over, 65% are in the labor force. The median household income is \$40,380, while the per capita income is \$18,193. Of the population, 9% are individuals below the poverty level.<sup>45</sup> When compared to Oklahoma and the other communities in Oklahoma in this study, Sand Springs exhibits the best current economic conditions. (See Table 6: 2000 Oklahoma Communities’ Economic Statistics on Page 29)

The City of Sand Springs started on the northern side of the Arkansas River with its industrial area located near the railroad and along the river with the downtown to the north and the residential area north of downtown. The downtown contains many buildings that were built in the 1920s and 1930s. (See Images 5-7 on Pages 39-40) This is especially recognized in the Art Deco Charles Page Library building that is currently used as the City museum. (See Image 8 on Page 40) The residential neighborhood to the north contains many homes built from between the 1920s and the 1950s in the prairie and ranch styles.

Sand Springs faces multiple economic development challenges. The industrial area near the river contains many unused buildings. Many of the larger industries that relied on the river and the railroad have moved away but there are a few that still remain. Like many cities in Oklahoma, the original economy of the City has changed leaving

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<sup>43</sup> See note 41 above.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> See note 42 above.



Image 5: Renovated storefront in the Sand Springs, Oklahoma old Main Street district.



Image 6: Buildings along Main Street in downtown Sand Springs.



Image 7: Streetscape off buildings looking North along Main Street.



Image 8: The historic Page Library now holds the Sand Springs History Museum.



many empty buildings and a new population of people living in the city but working and spending their money in Tulsa. Another hindrance to the community was the construction of Highway 64 that was built behind a row of buildings downtown, physically dividing the northern section of the City. The introduction of a strip mall on the southern side of the highway began to take what business there was from the downtown, leaving many vacant buildings in need of physical improvements.

### *The Program*

In 1992, a local business owner in the historic business district requested the City apply to the Main Street program. “The downtown business owners believed that the expertise and guidance from the program could assist our city in the revitalization efforts.”<sup>46</sup> Loy Calhoun, current City Manager, stated that the city expected to “revitalize and re-establish the importance of a viable central business district for the whole community providing jobs and services” by taking part in the program. The Main Street program would focus on the historic downtown with the assistance of the Sand Springs Chamber of Commerce and other state entities.

The Sand Springs Main Street consisted of approximately 21 blocks located in the historic central business district. Highway 64 to the south, 4th Street to the north, Adams Road to the east, and Wilson Road to the west form the approximate boundaries of the district. The program was set up with one full time employee, board of directors and the four committees. It was incorporated as a non-profit 501(C) 3 organization that reinvested \$6.3 million in public and private monies over the course of its five years of active status.<sup>47</sup> The main financial supporter was the City of Sand Springs along with the

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<sup>46</sup> Loy Calhoun, questionnaire response, March 2005.

<sup>47</sup> See note 31 above.

membership fees, grants, and fundraisers. Around 60% of the businesses located within the district participated in committees, meetings, and social events.<sup>48</sup> Press releases, public meetings, marketing brochures, and community celebrations were held to promote the activities of the Main Street program.

As part of the contract with the state office, all reinvestment statistics are recorded annually. During the life of the program, \$71,535 was invested in 28 façade renovations, and another \$2.7 million on other rehabilitations.<sup>49</sup> In comparison to other Main Street communities in Oklahoma there was less money being spent on physical improvements for the number of years it was active. The local program provided services to their members to assist in the rehabilitation of the buildings with discounts at the local hardware stores and local bank low interest loans.<sup>50</sup> During the program's activity, 70 new businesses opened and 208 new jobs were created.<sup>51</sup> This number of businesses and jobs are misleading in this district; in actuality, there was probably a higher turnover, which gives a different picture as to the impact of the program.

The Board of Directors of the Main Street program in Sand Springs was comprised of nine people; retail business owners, doctors, bankers, realtors, architects, as well as a librarian. They all showed a commitment to improve the local economy, but they had little time available after their personal commitments.<sup>52</sup> The commitment needed to implement the program requires more time than most volunteers are willing or able to contribute. They did however meet once a month to authorize the programs and

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<sup>48</sup> See note 36 above.

<sup>49</sup> See note 31 above.

<sup>50</sup> See note 36 above.

<sup>51</sup> See note 31 above.

<sup>52</sup> See note 36 above.

activities. The program manager was a full-time position hired by the City of Sand Springs. The job of the manager was to coordinate the activities of the program, encourage volunteers, fundraise, and market the program. There was only one program manager during the active status of the Main Street program and is still an employee of the City today. The program manager was a local resident of Sand Springs and had knowledge of the community and business owners. The program manager's strengths were organization, marketing, and maintaining "camaraderie" between the business owners. The City Manager believes that the main weakness of the program manager was their inability to effectively delegate task activities and responsibilities to volunteers.<sup>53</sup>

As with all Main Street programs, committees were formed representing each of the Main Street Four Point Approach. The people that comprised the committees had expertise in that area as well as represented the business owners in the district, though having enough time to meet was a weakness. The committees met once a month or as needed. To assist in the committees and carryout special promotions such as the Brick Paver Project, the Main Street Garden, and the Farmers Market, the program manager recruited around 30 volunteers through personal contacts. The volunteers represented a wide range of backgrounds and ages, from children to senior citizens. During the life of the program the number of volunteers increased but never reached critical mass that could sustain the program long-term.

Sand Springs received technical assistance and trainings, as part of the contract with the state office, as well as "state leadership support and encouragement."<sup>54</sup>

According to Loy Calhoun, the leadership training and organizational structure were the

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

most beneficial while the Oklahoma Main Street Awards selection criteria were the least. Overall, the program met the City's expectations, but felt that all communities should be recognized by the state annually. Only those Main Street communities that are considered the best examples in Organization, Promotion, Design, and Economic Restructuring are recognized yearly as the awards banquet. Sand Springs may not have won as many awards as they would have liked. The National Trust Main Street Center also provided on-site training and information to the City's business owners on ways to improve various aspects of their business pertaining to the Four Points and the program manager attended the National Conference every year while active.

After almost five years of being in the Main Street program, Sand Springs Main Street program went inactive in 1997. According to the City Manager, the main reason for going inactive was "the community's desire to create a public historic museum and organization to preserve and house the community's history... at the time the city could not fund both programs."<sup>55</sup> The desire of the community, which I hold reservations about considering the political nature of the organization, refocused their efforts on something with a more visible impact downtown. Ronald Frantz, of the Oklahoma Main Street Office believed the main reasons Sand Springs went inactive was the lack of political support and inability to implement the Four Points, especially Design.

The City still thinks well of the program and would potentially participate in the program again believing that "...if reinstated could bring the organization and professional expertise to guide and facilitate preservation and economic restructuring for the Main Street District."<sup>56</sup> Representatives from the City went to the application

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

workshop this past fall but due to the limited number of new members accepted each year and the numerous application requirements, the City elected not to pursue reinstatement at this time.

The city's Economic Development Department was created during the tenure of the Main Street program that now assists with the downtown activities. The Chamber of Commerce is also an active participant downtown. To assist in funding economic development and tourism activities, the City has instituted a hotel/motel tax. There has been a continued investment in the district for building renovations for both businesses and residences. The Sand Springs Museum and other special events are a major draw for tourists into the downtown area, which was previously part of the Main Street district.

### Chickasha

Chickasha, the county seat of Grady County, is located 42 miles southwest of Oklahoma City at the intersection of Route 62 and Route 81. This rural area was settled in 1892 and operates under an elected Mayor and City Council form of government since the adoption of a charter in 1977. The City Council appoints a City Manager to handle the management, implementation of the policies, and to bring important issues to the City Council. Today Chickasha consists of 18 square miles.<sup>57</sup> In 2000, the population of the city was 15,850, an increase of 5% from 1990, a smaller amount than the other studied communities. Of the population, 81% are white with the next highest race being African Americans (8%).<sup>58</sup> (See Table 5: See Table 5: 2000 Oklahoma Communities' Demographic Statistics on Page 28)

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<sup>57</sup> Chickasha Oklahoma then and now, "History," <http://www.chickashaoptimist.org/history1.html> (accessed March 16, 2005).

<sup>58</sup> US Census Bureau's official Web site, "Chickasha, Ok Census Quick Facts," <http://censtats.census.gov/data/OK/1604013950.pdf> (accessed March 16, 2005).

Chickasha has had a very interesting and lively past. Part of both the Indian and Oklahoma Territories until statehood in 1907 the Chisholm trail passed through what today is known as Chickasha, a Native American word meaning “rebel.”<sup>59</sup> Chickasha attracted many people to the area as the land became available. The economy centered on business, farming, and education. Chickasha was home to the first Women’s College in Oklahoma that today is known as the University of Science and Arts in Oklahoma. Today, the major economic sector is manufacturing, fueled by easy access to Interstate 44 and the railroad. The largest employer, not including retail, is ArvinMeritor, a commercial and industrial truck parts manufacturer.<sup>60</sup> Of the population 16 years and over, 57% are in the labor force. The median household income is \$26,369, while the per capita income is \$14,797. Of the population, 18% are individuals below the poverty level.<sup>61</sup> The economic characteristics in this community are less than the Oklahoma and the studied communities within this state. (See Table 6: 2000 Oklahoma Communities’ Economic Statistics on Page 29)

Chickasha grew from a railroad town into a city and county seat in the plains of Oklahoma. Much of the growth in the central business district occurred next to the railroad after statehood. The territorial style commercial architecture is representative of many other 1920s downtown businesses. There are also a few art deco style buildings intermixed. (See Images 9-12 on Page 47-48) Many of the buildings are 2 to 4 stories. The City grew both south and west; many new manufacturing facilities are located on the eastern edge of the city limits. Like other cities in Oklahoma, many of its residents commute to the larger cities to make purchases. The downtown experienced a period of

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<sup>59</sup> See note 57 above.

<sup>60</sup> Chickasha Chamber of Commerce, “Community Statistics,” <http://www.chickashachamber.com/community.htm> (accessed March 16, 2005).

<sup>61</sup> See note 58 above.



Image 9: Indian Deco County Courthouse in downtown Chickasha, Oklahoma.



Image 10: Many of the Buildings along Kansas Avenue, once a part of the Chickasha Main Street district, have the upper stories covered.



Image 11: The buildings in the downtown represent a variety of sizes and historic uses.



Image 12: Washita Theater is located downtown on Chickasha Avenue.



disinvestments since the 1980s, causing buildings to become vacant and businesses to suffer.

### *The Program*

A local business owner brought the Main Street program to the City's attention in 1996 to provide an organizational method for economic development improvements and to "combat apathy."<sup>62</sup> A similar organization existed before Main Street though it was less organized. Many of the communities queried found that the structure contributed to the reasons why they applied to the program. The program supplies a ready-made organization to be implemented at the grassroots level without the hassle of having to figure out how to begin. Patrick Brooks, a local business employee and active with the local Main Street program from 1996 to 1999, expected "a measurable improvement in level of and quality of retail trade in the business district... along with improved storefronts."<sup>63</sup> The Main Street program would focus solely on the historic downtown with the assistance of the Chickasha Chamber of Commerce.

The Chickasha Main Street consisted of approximately 24 blocks located in the historic central business district with about 130 businesses.<sup>64</sup> The program was set up with one full time employee, board of directors and four committees. It was incorporated as a non-profit 501(C) 3 organization, and reinvested \$2.5 million in public and private monies over the course of its three years of active status.<sup>65</sup> The City of Chickasha provided half of the funds with the remaining financial support from the business owners. The activities funded by these supporters were advertised their activities by word of

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<sup>62</sup> Patrick Brooks, questionnaire response, March 2005.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> See note 31 above.

mouth, the local newspaper, and radio station.

All reinvestment statistics are maintained annually as required by the state office. During the life of the program, \$392,033 was invested in 24 façade renovations, and another \$1.2 million on other rehabilitations. This was a considerable investment for this community, which does not seem to have a great economic base currently. During the program's active status, 40 new businesses opened and 24 new jobs were created.<sup>66</sup> This impact seems realistic but I wonder if this would have occurred without the formation of the Main Street program.

The Chickasha Main Street Board of Directors comprised 10 people who served 1 to 3 year staggered terms. It consisted primarily of local business and property owners of diverse backgrounds. Their weaknesses were a lack of commitment to the program and "burnout problems."<sup>67</sup> This lack of commitment means that they probably accomplished very little, which led to the turnover of the Board. Without a committed and constant Board, there is not enough stability for the program to achieve much. They did however meet monthly to set policy as well as participate in the hands-on work of the committees. The executive committee hired as a full-time program manager as required by Main Street. There was only one program manager during the three years of participation. The person had previously been a program manager elsewhere in Oklahoma and worked well independently. One of the main functions of the program manager is to recruit and motivate the volunteers. The most noted weakness of the program manager identified in the survey was their inability to know get to the members and motivating members to

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> See note 62 above.

actively participate in the program.<sup>68</sup>

The Main Street program also consisted of four committees, each representing one of the Main Street Four Points. The committees met monthly to work on activities according to their “prescribed functions.”<sup>69</sup> The focus of the activities was on promotions while the least were in design. The volunteers consisted mostly of merchants that participated in the activities. They represented the older residents. During the life of the program the number of volunteers decreased, primarily due to the “lack of success of the program and [lack] of long term commitment.”<sup>70</sup> Without maintaining and recruiting new volunteers, there are few people to implement any activities or create change.

The state office provided the Chickasha Main Street with trainings and evaluations. Pat Brooks felt that the “manager was having to spend too much time in training and attending meetings at [the] state level.”<sup>71</sup> The state and national meetings are supposed to assist the program managers implement the program on a daily basis. These trainings are also for the Board Members and committees set goals and priorities. I think the perception of the manager spending too much time at trainings is exaggerated somewhat. In actuality, there probably was no perceived benefit from her attending these trainings if there was no impact in the downtown. The most beneficial assistance was the structure it provided as well as the need to set goals and was thought to be above average overall. The least beneficial was the building and design assistance. There was no known assistance provided by the National Trust Main Street Center and nobody attended the National Conference while active. This may have been due to unavailability of funds

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

or the decision is what not worth the money.

The Chickasha Main Street program went inactive after only three years in 1999. According to Mr. Brooks, “ the City of Chickasha was not convinced after 3 years that the funding was justified in measurable results, so they pulled their part of the funding.”<sup>72</sup> The lack of funding to further support the program was a main factor in its demise. Chickasha, being a small community, had limited financial resources and high program expectations. When significant results were not achieved in a short period of time, the City withdrew their support. Not unlike Sand Springs that elected to spend their money on other priorities deemed more important at that time. Pat Brooks potentially sees Chickasha participating in the Main Street program again. According to the Oklahoma Main Street, individuals interested in rejoining the program have contacted them.

Currently, there is a form of the program active in the downtown business district. There are still volunteers that are active in the district, administratively supported by the Chamber of Commerce. The group consists of interested business owners who “conduct promotions and address issues of common interest.”<sup>73</sup> There has been little change since the program went inactive but there are improvements to the properties occurring nevertheless. There are new property owners in the area and are increasing the usage of the upper floors for residential uses. The historic business district has recently become a part of the State and National Register of Historic Places.

### **Pennsylvania Inactive Local Programs**

In Pennsylvania, there have been 50 Main Street programs considered inactive

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

since the state program began in 1980. Unlike most other state Main Street programs, Pennsylvania provides financial assistance to each local program through a five-year grant system at which time local programs must leave the program. Some programs continue to stay active but without the direct assistance of the PDC and DCED. This section will examine the reasons some programs become inactive before the end of the first 5 years. It appears to be primarily due to the lack of sufficient local funding and conflicts with the state office and local governments. Fairhill neighborhood, The Township of Abington, and Mansfield Borough were chosen as a representative cross section of the inactive Pennsylvania communities at different periods of time over the past twenty-five years. Each of these communities represents an inner city, suburban, and rural program, respectively.

State	City	Founded	Size (sq. mi.)	2000 Population	Percent Change 1990-2000	Largest Race	2nd Largest Race
Pennsylvania	5th and Lehigh (Philadelphia Statistical Data)	1682	135	1,516,000	-4%	White 45%	African American 43%
	Abington	c. 1700	15	56,103		White 84%	African American 11%
	Mansfield	1857	105	3,411	-4%	White 93%	African American 4%

*Table 7: 2000 Pennsylvania Community Demographic Statistics*

<b>City</b>	<b>% in Labor Force</b>	<b>Median Household Income</b>	<b>Per Capita Income</b>	<b>% Below the Poverty Level</b>
5th and Lehigh (Philadelphia Statistical Data)	55%	\$30,746	\$16,509	23%
Abington	65%	\$59,921	\$30,331	4%
Mansfield	58%	\$27,500	\$11,042	27%

*Table 8: 2000 Pennsylvania Community Economic Statistics*

### 5<sup>th</sup> and Lehigh, Fairhill Neighborhood

The Fairhill neighborhood is located at 5<sup>th</sup> and Lehigh streets in northern Philadelphia, the second largest city in Pennsylvania and 5<sup>th</sup> largest in the United States according to the 2000 census. The city operates under an elected Mayor and Council form of government. Today Philadelphia is located within 135 square miles of a larger metropolitan statistical area. In 2000, the population of the city was 1,516,000, a decrease of 4.3% from 1990. Of the population, white and African Americans comprise the majority of the population.<sup>74</sup> In the Fairhill neighborhood however, the population consists primarily of Hispanics (83%).<sup>75</sup> (See Table 7: 2000 Pennsylvania Community Demographic Statistics on Page 53)

Located along the Delaware and Schuylkill rivers, Philadelphia was founded in 1682. Known as the “Birthplace of the Nation,” the first Capitol of the United States was in Philadelphia. Originally laid out in 1682, the city grew to encompass Philadelphia

<sup>74</sup> US Census Bureau’s official Web site, “Philadelphia, Pa Census Quick Facts,” <http://censtats.census.gov/data/PA/1604260000.pdf> (accessed March 16, 2005).

<sup>75</sup> US Census Bureau’s American Fact Finder Web site, Fairhill neighborhood statistics, <http://factfinder.census.gov> (accessed March 16, 2005).

County by the 1890s, as it became a center for manufacturing and shipping during the Industrial Revolution. Fairhill was one of the many immigrant worker neighborhoods that grew during this time. The major employers in the Philadelphia include the service industry, hospitals, and the universities. Of the population 16 years and over, 55% are in the labor force. The median household income is \$30,746, while the per capita income is \$16,509. Of the population, 23% are individuals below the poverty level.<sup>76</sup> In the Fairhill neighborhood the median household income is \$11,993, while the per capita income is \$6,053. Of the population, more than 60% are individuals below the poverty level.<sup>77</sup> The state economic conditions are better overall. The Fairhill neighborhood has major economic concerns that could impede or help change to occur. (See Table 8: 2000 Pennsylvania Community Economic Statistics on Page 54)

The Fairhill Main Street is district is a commercial corridor along 5<sup>th</sup> street between Lehigh and Allegheny Avenues. Along this street is a mixture of row houses with and without street level storefronts. These late 1800s to early 1900s structures have simple traditional facades. (See Images 13 and 14 on Page 56) This area was originally built as working class housing for the employees of nearby manufacturing facilities. Many of these houses remain but are in poor condition. The infrastructure along 5<sup>th</sup> Street has been updated and is larger in scale. After the industrial period ended, many businesses closed down and the neighborhood began a period of decline as residents moved out of the inner city and were replaced by poorer immigrants. In 1982, the Hispanic Association of Contractors and Enterprises (HACE) Community Development Corporation (CDC) formed “...to combat community deterioration through economic development initiatives that address commercial revitalization, employment

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<sup>76</sup> See note 74 above.

<sup>77</sup> See note 75 above.



Image 13: A mixture of residential and commercial properties within the 5th and Lehigh Main Street corridor.



Image 14: The properties along the commercial corridor vary in size and condition.



opportunities, the creation of safe affordable housing, and the provision of support services to meet the needs of the community residents toward re-building the neighborhood's economic base.”<sup>78</sup>

### *The Program*

In 1996, under HACE sponsorship, Fairhill received Main Street designation as part of the National Trust and LISC's Neighborhood Main Street Initiative. The neighborhood commercial corridor along 5<sup>th</sup> Street was the focus of their efforts. “The Main Street Program provides the needed staffing, expertise and technical support to develop, coordinate and implement a successful revitalization strategy.”<sup>79</sup> HACE had been working on economic development efforts throughout the neighborhood, and has been recognized for its efforts on a variety of projects. By participating in the Main Street program, it would provide them the needed financial seed money to get started on their mission to revitalize the commercial corridor.

The Main Street program was only one of the neighborhood revitalization approaches offered by HACE. The program manager was a full-time position hired and managed by the HACE Board of Directors. In the Fairhill district the manager was located in an office on the Lehigh, which allowed them to maintain a network with the business and property owners on the street.<sup>80</sup> Since 1982, HACE has leveraged over \$50 million in public and private monies that was reinvested in the neighborhood.<sup>81</sup> The main financial supporters were LISC and discretionary funding from the PA Department of

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<sup>78</sup> Hispanic Association of Contractors and Enterprises, “Economic Development,” <http://www.hacecdc.org/economic.htm> (accessed March 31, 2005).

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> I am unaware of any information regarding committee and volunteer efforts, if there were any at all.

<sup>81</sup> Hispanic Association of Contractors and Enterprises, “Accomplishments,” <http://www.hacecdc.org/accomplish.html> (accessed March 31, 2005).

Community and Economic Development for its first year. HACE worked closely with the Fifth Street Business Association, merchants, LISC, community residents and community organizations to implement the program. HACE advertised and promoted the efforts and achievements of the program using many different media types in both English and Spanish. They also developed and promoted the “El Centro de Oro” theme for the commercial district around 5<sup>th</sup> and Lehigh.

During the Main Street program’s activity, they were able to create physical improvements to the district. One example was an infrastructure improvement plan that concentrated on improving the streetscape. (See Images 15 and 16 on Page 59) They received a “Towny” award for their efforts in 1998 from PDC. The improvements that were made have not been well maintained and more enhancements are needed. They also implemented a “Graffiti Free Zone” program to remove building graffiti within the district.<sup>82</sup>

“Technical assistance in fund-raising strategies, marketing, loan packaging, personnel management, licensing and other technical areas...”<sup>83</sup> were part of the services offered through the Neighborhood Main Street Initiative and HACE. They also utilized all Four Points of the program as well as added their own, Clean and Safety committees.

Today, the 5<sup>th</sup> and Lehigh Main Street is no longer considered a designated Main Street program even though it maintains the name. The program is still active in the neighborhood and acts as a dependent program of HACE’s. There is still a manager and

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<sup>82</sup> Hispanic Association of Contractors and Enterprises, “Commercial Revitalization,” <http://www.hacecdc.org/commerce.htm> (accessed March 31, 2005).

<sup>83</sup> Hispanic Association of Contractors and Enterprises, “Programs,” <http://www.hacecdc.org/programs.html> (accessed March 31, 2005).



Image 15: The streetscape improvements along the corridor included the coloring of the sidewalks.



Image 16: HACE Mall is one of the properties that HACE has renovated along the commercial corridor and now houses their office.

assistant, working out of an office on 5th Street. Since 1997, over 20,000 square feet of retail/office space has been developed along the corridor and another 25,000 square foot project is under development.<sup>84</sup> The Philadelphia Department of Commerce funds many of the activities occurring on the corridor. One of these projects is a new streetscape and design vision for neighborhood commercial corridor.

### The Township of Abington

The Township of Abington is located 16 miles north of downtown Philadelphia. Though the city dates back to before the 1700s, it wasn't incorporated until 1704 and operates under a Board of Commissioners. The Board employs a Manager to oversee the daily administrative duties of the Township and to implement the policies as set by the Board. The Township encompasses 15 square miles today.<sup>85</sup> This suburban community in Montgomery County is located within the larger metropolitan statistical area of Philadelphia. In 2000, the population of the city was 56,103 and consisted primarily of whites.<sup>86</sup> (See Table 7: 2000 Pennsylvania Community Demographic Statistics on Page 53)

Many of the original transportation routes before the 1700s still pass through the Township where many industrial and church buildings still remain. Today, the two largest employer segments are the medicine and education. The Township is also contains a major shopping center and many small businesses.<sup>87</sup> Of the population 16

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Abington Township's official Web site, "Township Statistics," <http://www.abington.org/info/stats.htm> (accessed March 16, 2005).

<sup>86</sup> US Census Bureau's official Web site, "Abington, Pa Census Quick Facts," <http://censtats.census.gov/data/PA/0604209100156.pdf> (accessed March 16, 2005).

<sup>87</sup> Abington Township's official Web site, "Township Background," <http://www.abington.org/info/about.htm> (accessed March 16, 2005).

years and over, 65% are in the labor force. The median household income is \$59,921, while the per capita income is \$30,331. Of the population, 3.6% are individuals below the poverty level.<sup>88</sup> Of the communities in this study, Abington is the most affluent. (See Table 8: 2000 Pennsylvania Community Economic Statistics on Page 54)

The Township of Abington is made up of older residential areas that have two major business corridors running through it in a north-south direction, Old York Road and Easton Road. These commercial and residential neighborhoods vary in age and architectural style. While the residential areas have been well maintained, the commercial centers had been lacking investment and physical maintenance over the years. Many of the residents of this suburban community were going elsewhere to shop causing businesses to close and buildings to become vacant. The Township formed an economic development committee that worked with the Township's Economic Development Department to allocate funds for improvements to these corridors. In 1995, The Township of Abington applied to have Main Street designation to assist in the efforts to revitalize these commercial corridors.

### *The Program*

The Township applied to the state program after a 1995 survey of local business owners indicated interest in the Main Street program.<sup>89</sup> The perceived benefit was to provide "assistance with implementing economic goals."<sup>90</sup> The Township had previously dedicated funds for streetscape and other physical improvements in the commercial corridors with mixed results. The Township expected to recruit, retain, and promote new

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<sup>88</sup> See note 86 above.

<sup>89</sup> Matthew Lahaza, interview conversation, March 10, 2005.

<sup>90</sup> Matthew Lahaza, questionnaire response, March 2005.

and current businesses with the assistance of Main Street. Since there were nine commercial corridors in Abington, the program focused on two in the beginning, with hopes of focusing on all by the end of five years.

The two commercial corridors that were the focus of the Main Street program were in Keswick and Roslyn. Keswick commercial corridor consisted of two blocks along Keswick Avenue, east of Easton Road. Roslyn consisted of six blocks along Easton Road between Susquehanna Road and Woodland Road. These two corridors are located about one mile apart. Keswick, located in the southwestern corner of the Township, is characterized by two to three story buildings that have been rehabilitated into an “Old English” style with stucco walls and applied timbers around a roundabout. (See Images 17-19 on Pages 63-64) Roslyn is located north of Keswick and is characterized by one and two story 1930s-40s traditional commercial buildings and more modern suburban style strip mall with parking along the street. (See Images 20 and 21 on Pages 64 and 65)

The program was set up with one full time employee to split their time between the corridors, board of directors and the four committees. The main financial supporters, other than the state office, were the Township of Abington and the Chamber of Commerce. Around 70% of the businesses in Keswick and 90% in Roslyn were included in the Main Street district. Of these only about 50% participated.<sup>91</sup> Most of the promotions of the activities of the Main Street program focused on business promotions and by word of mouth. The business promotions included events, flyers, directories, and newsletters that were circulated to area residents. While there was not a website for the

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid.



Image 17: The Keswick commercial corridor in Abington, Pennsylvania is reminiscent of Tudor architecture.



Image 18: The Keswick Theater is a popular regional attraction.





Image 19: The roundabout and facade renovation building were completed during the active status of Main Street.



Image 20: The Roslyn commercial corridor in Abington is primarily characterized by one-story strip commercial.





Image 21: Streetscape improvements along Easton Road in the Roslyn commercial corridor.

Main Street program, the Township maintains a website that includes web pages on economic development activities and promotions throughout the Township. They still call most of their efforts under the Main Street heading.

The Board of Directors consisted of the Economic Development Committee that was set up prior to the Main Street Designation. They consisted of business and property owners as well as residents. The Board's strength was their business experience but met only once a month. Their job was to "guide the process" of the Main Street program.<sup>92</sup> The Township hired and paid the full time program manager who was supervised by the Assistant Township Manager. This created a stronger tie to the local government rather than to the Board of Directors who was suppose to lead the efforts. However, even the Board of Directors was ultimately linked to the Township. The main job of the manager was to promote the businesses on both corridors. During the active status of the program, there were two managers. The first manager had been a Main Street manager previously in another Pennsylvania community, and had been suggested for the position by the state office. While he was sociable with the business owners, he was "disorganized."<sup>93</sup> There was no perceived negative impact of having two managers.

Design, Organization, and Promotion committees for the Abington Main Streets consisted of the village merchants, while the Economic Development Committee was the same as the Board of Directors.<sup>94</sup> They met with business owners and attended town meetings. The committees held meetings 2-4 times a month. During Town meetings, volunteers were recruited for fund raising, newsletters, and events. Most of the

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Matthew Lahaza, e-mail message, March 31, 2005

volunteers consisted of active residents and business owners. Over the two years of activity, the number of volunteers increased, especially for the “grand gala celebration.”<sup>95</sup>

According to the Township of Abington, the state office provided funding and advice to the local Main Street program. The assistance provided by the state office did not meet with their expectations. They received no assistance from the National Trust nor attended any of the conferences. While all Four Points were recognized, promotion was the most utilized by the program and design and restructuring the least.

After only two years of active status, the Abington Main Street program decided not to participate in the state program any longer. The major deciding factor according to the Township Manager, Burton Conway, was due to the control DCED wanted over the program while supplying little of the funds. “For the \$30,000+ we were getting via the program in comparison to the greater amount of funding and effort that we were putting into it (c. \$400,000/year)...Between that and all the reporting they wanted we decided to do it on our own.”<sup>96</sup> Matthew Lahaza, the Economic Development Director in Abington commented that the DCED wanted to come in and change the structure of what the Township had set up for the program. As previously noted, a weakness of the Pennsylvania program is the perception that it is only a grant program. By the events that occurred in Abington, it seems they were one of these communities who wanted the funds but did not realize the requirements of the program.

Another issue was the promotion of the efforts in the commercial corridors as

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<sup>95</sup> See note 90 above.

<sup>96</sup> Burton T. Conway, questionnaire response, March 2005.

Main Street successes without mentioning the Townships efforts in the project.<sup>97</sup> The state office felt the major factors in Abington going inactive were the facts that they had two commercial corridors, “people problems, and too government directed.”<sup>98</sup> The Township has since recognized the need of an employee dedicated to the commercial corridor efforts, but is not interested in joining the program again at this time.

Today the Abington Township Economic Development Department has taken over many of the efforts of the Main Street program. There are tax abatements offered for improvements to properties and façade and building rehabilitation grants and loans. There is also a Business Incubator Resource through the partnership between the Township, Penn State-Abington campus, and the Eastern Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce. This provides assistance to new and current businesses. The two Main Street districts have maintained some of their events through the assistance of volunteers. The economic conditions of the area have continued to improve and today there is little vacancy in the business districts.

### Mansfield Borough

Located in Tioga County, near the northern border of Pennsylvania and New York, sits Mansfield Borough. It is located 133 miles north of Harrisburg, the capital of Pennsylvania. This rural city was incorporated in 1857 and operates under elected Borough Council and Mayor form of government. Mansfield consists of 105 square miles in the Mountains of north central Pennsylvania. In 2000, the population of the city was 3,411, a 4% decrease from 1990. Of the population, 93% are white with the next

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<sup>97</sup> See note 90 above.

<sup>98</sup> Diana Kerr, questionnaire response, March 2005.

highest race being African Americans (4%).<sup>99</sup> (See Table 7: 2000 Pennsylvania Community Demographic Statistics on Page 53)

Asa Mann, one of the first settlers, laid out and sold tracts of land in the northern part of what today is known as Mansfield Borough in 1807. Known as Mann's Field, the first major industries in the Borough were a sawmill and gristmill.<sup>100</sup> Today manufacturing is the main industry. Another economic contributor in the Borough is Mansfield University that began as a Seminary in 1857, then a State College. Of the population 16 years and over, 58% are in the labor force. The median household income is \$27,500, while the per capita income is \$11,042. Of the population, 27% are individuals below the poverty level.<sup>101</sup> Like the rural Main Street in Oklahoma, it contains one of the poorest economic conditions of the communities within this study in its state. (See Table 8: 2000 Pennsylvania Community Economic Statistics on Page 54)

Mansfield grew into a town that provided services for the rural farmers around it. Much of the area around the Borough is still used for farming but also offers many recreation opportunities. In the historic section of Mansfield are large and small Victorian style houses that surround the historic central business district. The Ellen Run, a large creek, borders the historic section of town to the west and Mansfield University sits on the hill to the east. Many of the commercial buildings in the downtown are 2 to 3 stories along the Main Street at Wilson Avenue. (See Images 22-25 on Pages 70 and 71) The city grew North and South along Main Street, Business Route 15 today.

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<sup>99</sup> US Census Bureau's official Web site, "Mansfield, Pa Census Quick Facts," <http://censtats.census.gov/data/PA/1604013950.pdf> (accessed March 16, 2005).

<sup>100</sup> The Greater Mansfield Area Chamber of Commerce Inc., "Inofrmation," <http://www.mansfield.org/information.htm> (accessed March 16, 2005).

<sup>101</sup> See note 99 above.



Image 22: There are a variety of building styles and details on the buildings within the original downtown.



Image 23: Main Street is a major transportation route from one end of the Borough to the other.





Image 24: Many of the buildings in the downtown area contain tourist geared retail such as antique and novelty stores.



Image 25: Victorian Architecture and details on the commercial structures is common in Mansfield, Pennsylvania.

Today there are many antique shops for tourists as well as specialty stores geared to the University clientele. Recently the southern end of the Borough has experienced strip mall development that is attracting business away from the downtown. After discussions with the Department of Community Affairs and other Main Street communities, the Main Street program was selected to assist in the revitalization of the downtown.

### *The Program*

In 1992, the Mansfield Main Street became an incorporated 501(c)3 organization. The Borough officials applied to be a Main Street program to "...provide a full-time main street manager to coordinate programs, marketing, and revitalization activities."<sup>102</sup> According to Ed Grala, who was active with the local Main Street program from 1993 to 1997, the Town also expected the program to provide leadership, a unified downtown image, and a balanced business mix. The main sources of funding for the program included the Borough, Betterment Organization of Mansfield, the businesses and bank.

The Main Street district was eight blocks by six blocks of street frontage, with Main Street as the main thoroughfare. Approximately 50 businesses were located within the district, of which about 80% participated.<sup>103</sup> The program offered marketing opportunities, low interest loans for façade improvements, and grants for improvements to properties. Their activities were advertised in the local newspaper, on posters and by the businesses and government. A website did not exist until recently. The Greater Area Mansfield Chamber of Commerce manages it.

An executive committee with five sub committees and a program manager made

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<sup>102</sup> Ed Grala, questionnaire response, March 2005.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.



up the structure of the organization. The executive committee, or board of directors, provided the direction to the sub committees as well as reviewed the reports on activities by the committees and manager once a month. Consisting of varied backgrounds, they had “expertise in finance, land development, planning, transportation, business, and recreation.”<sup>104</sup> This varied expertise was a strength as well as a weakness of the committee since they did not always agree on strategies. The program manager was hired to provide the leadership needed to carry out the policies set out by the executive committee. The fulltime position was hired and paid by the executive committee. There were two program managers, the first only lasting three months. The manager during the majority of the program’s active status had worked with the Mansfield Chamber of Commerce. While the program manager was organized and “kept on top of things” they lacked good diplomatic skills.<sup>105</sup> Being a program manager requires you to have not only organizational skills but also the ability to work with a variety of people.

The Main Street program also consisted of five committees. These committees comprised of businessmen, elected and appointed Borough Officials, and representatives from the University. Their role was to “formulate ideas that improve the policies and programming activities.”<sup>106</sup> They worked with the residents, business owners and University representatives to help formulate the ideas. The committees came from diverse backgrounds that according to Ed Grala, was also their strength and weakness like in the executive committee. The inability of the committees to work together limited their ability to carry activities through to completion. This inevitably led to the slow dismantling of the committees. These committees met several times a week but only

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

once a quarter by the end of activity. To implement the activities planned by the committees, volunteers were recruited by word of mouth. They primarily worked on streetscape improvements. By the end of the program's active status, the numbers of volunteers decreased. According to Ed Grala, "frustration had set in for everyone because of the strip development south of town."<sup>107</sup>

The state office provided technical assistance and funding to the Mansfield Main Street program along with the PDC. There was no comment regarding what the town found beneficial or not from the assistance. According to the questionnaire respondent, there was no known assistance provided by the National Trust Main Street Center and nobody attended the National Conference every year while active.

In 1998, after almost 6 years, the Main Street program went inactive in Mansfield. The main reason behind the decision was the lack of funding. The costs of maintaining a full time program manager was prohibitive due to the lack of business funds that prevented matching grant opportunities. The state office replied that a major factor in going inactive was that the "organization was in competition with... the Chamber of Commerce."<sup>108</sup> Both the Chamber of Commerce and the Main Street Program focus efforts on the business district, which would normally lend itself to a partnership rather than a competitor. The perceived long-term impact was "an attractive, thriving CBD (Central Business District) with direction and unity."<sup>109</sup> This was realized "to a degree" in the streetscape and façade improvements and new businesses. There has not been any new interest in rejoining the Main Street program.

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> See note 98 above.

<sup>109</sup> See note 102 above.

There are currently efforts being undertaken by both the Chamber of Commerce and the Borough to assist the business owners and continue streetscape improvements. Promotional activities to attract the University students to the businesses have continued since Main Street. There has been some change in recent years, as antique stores and cafes have replaced the small retail stores. This change has primarily occurred due to the strip development on the south end of Mansfield. The positive is that the downtown storefronts have little vacancy.

### **Local Program Comparison**

The local Main Street programs in Oklahoma and Pennsylvania have had varied experiences and results. Overall, they have seen mixed results. The differences and similarities between the programs can be seen in the relationship between the characteristics of the community, their structure and amount of funds invested in the community. (See Table 9: Community Comparison by State)

The inner-city examples chosen for this study appeared very different at first glance but have similar characteristics. Automobile Alley, located in Oklahoma City is characterized by economic conditions similar to the state as a whole, while Fairhill is in poorer economic conditions than the city and state in which it is located. The structure of the Main Street program in Fairhill was located within a Community Development Corporation. This framework is similar to the business improvement district that Automobile Alley is now under. Though Fairhill has not continued with the program due to funding reasons, the same as Automobile Alley, this structure may work best for inner-city Main Street programs if funds can be better allocated and shared. Both programs were able to acquire funding from the city in which they are located.

						No. of Managers During Tenure
State	Main Street Community	Founded	Ended	Main Reason for Leaving	Expectations Met?	
Oklahoma	Automobile Alley	1996	2000	Funding	Yes	3
	Sand Springs	1992	1997	Funding	Somewhat	1
	Chickasha	1996	1999	Funding	No	1
Pennsylvania	5th and Lehigh	1996	2001	Funding	NA	2
	Abington	1995	1997	Funding	No	2
	Mansfield	1992	1998	Funding	NA	2
State	Main Street Community	Total Invesment*	No. of Buildings Rehabilitated*	Net Gain in Businesses*	Net Gain in Jobs*	
Oklahoma	Automobile Alley	\$30,000,000	18	33	72	
	Sand Springs	\$6,300,000	28	70	208	
	Chickasha	\$2,500,000	24	40	24	
Pennsylvania	5th and Lehigh	NA	NA	NA	NA	
	Abington	NA	NA	NA	NA	
	Mansfield	NA	NA	NA	NA	

\* Statistics in Pennsylvania were not available for inactive programs.

*Table 9: Community Program Comparison by State*

Like the inner-city examples the conditions, structure, and funding of the suburban examples are similar. The suburban Main Streets chosen for this study both contain positive economic conditions in comparison with the other studied communities and the state in which they are located. Both organizations were organized under the city government with the program manager hired and supervised by the local government.

The funding was also closely tied to the government. In both cases, this strong connection between the program and the local government contributed to the termination of the program.

The rural Main Street community examples in this study also share similar conditions and issues. In both Oklahoma and Pennsylvania, these communities are characterized by poor economic conditions when compared to the other examples and the states. The Chickasha and Mansfield programs were structured similarly at the grass roots level. The reliance on the business and property owners and other volunteers was both a positive and negative in the implantation of the program. The lack of funds and competing use of limited funds for other citywide activities were also an issue in these communities.

These example Main Street communities do not only share common characteristics by the type of community but also over all in their decisions to leave the program. The overall findings of this analysis are in the following chapter.

## **Chapter 4: Analysis of Findings**

The Main Street Program has had much success across the country but there have also been some “failures.” The reasons behind these “failures” have drawn little attention, since the focus has been on how to create a model community. The possibility that some communities are not able to maintain this kind of program is rarely addressed by the community themselves or by the state office. In this analyses the reasons behind inactive states, and the interaction between local, state, and national programs, are identified.

### **Local Inactive Main Street Findings**

As identified in the “Theories of Failure” section of this Thesis, there are many possible reasons why local programs go inactive. This data and analysis has revealed five main causes found to consistently occur in the examined communities regardless of the state: structure, funding, program flexibility, commitment, and unattainable expectations.

The *structure* of the Main Street program can easily lead to the failure or success of the program in a community. Depending on the strengths and weaknesses of a community, the structure of the organization can be set up as an independent non-profit organization, a program offered by another organization, or part of the local government or chamber of commerce. An independent 501(c) 3 organization seems to work the best in communities where the business owners are committed to the program and the community’s population is large enough to fundraise and carryout activities. When a Main Street program acts exclusively under the control of a local government, their efforts unavoidably become “politicized.” Communities will inevitably have competing

priorities for limited city funds. When those public funds are used to improve private business it is often considered a lower priority and funds are shifted to other projects.

Sand Springs, Oklahoma is an example of a community that was controlled by the local government that led to its demise in the end. Even though the program had some positive results the City held the purse strings and employed the program manager. Due to this unbalanced control over the program, when the City decided to pull all funding and withdraw staff support in order to fund a new City Historical Museum, there was little the volunteers could do to sustain the program.

The promise of new *funding* is one of the primary reasons communities look to the Main Street program to revitalize their historic commercial districts. If a program does not have a sustainable funding source it will be difficult to survive long-term. The reliance on only a few methods of fundraising is a major weakness of some of these programs. A program will be less likely to succeed without sufficient funds to pay for a program manager, streetscape and property owner assisted building improvements, as well as a variety of planned activities that bring locals and tourists to the district.

In Mansfield, Pennsylvania, the cost of maintaining a full-time manager and a lack of diversified funding sources contributed to the program's decline and inactive status. Once the initial five-year grant ran out, the program found that it had not established an alternative revenue source great enough to cover expenses long-term. The organization relied too heavily on the grant supplied by the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development and did not plan ahead or diversify their funding streams.

Main Street has adopted a “one size fits all” approach for their program that lacks *flexibility*. Even though every community has a unique set of needs, Main Street forces each community to conform to their Four Point Approach in order to participate in the program. While the Four Point Approach defines a methodology, the tools developed should allow for more customized approaches geared toward the particular needs of each community. The strengths and weaknesses of a community identify what the Main Street program should address. If physical improvements are the most pressing need, then the Design Committee may take precedence in funds and volunteers, but the other important needs must not be forgotten or totally pushed aside.

Some communities do not have the large base of interested participants to form four independent committees and other volunteer activities. They may need to work with or join other organizations to combine resources, which will provide a stronger organization or more funds. This occurred in the Automobile Alley® Main Street program, where the lack of flexibility in the program’s requirements led them to withdraw from the program, much to their disappointment. Yet when they partnered with other business districts and pooled their resources, they were able to succeed. Unfortunately, the Main Street Program does not provide for membership of this type. A community’s commitment to the implementation of the program and interest in revitalizing the commercial district should be the main criteria for participation in Main Street program.

One of the key ingredients of a successful Main Street program is local *commitment* of time and financial resources. This commitment includes all those involved with the program implementation throughout its life whether it is the paid



program manager, volunteers, business owners or sponsoring organization. The Main Street program is designed to be a long-term commitment. These inactive communities tend to have a common characteristic of a high degree of participant turnover, which helped contribute to their poor results. While new committee members and program managers can be beneficial and productive, continuity is also important especially in the early years. Making too many changes early in the program, for reasons other than ineffective staff, results in little if any of the original short-term goals being realized. A consequence of this ineffectiveness can lead to volunteers and businesses losing interest in the program.

In Chickasha, Oklahoma one of the weaknesses identified by the survey respondent was the lack of commitment and “burnout” problems by both the Board of Directors and committee members.<sup>110</sup> Due to the heavy emphasis on volunteers in Main Street programs, these core support groups are critical to sustaining the program. The dwindling community support fueled the City’s own doubts and lack of commitment, which ultimately led to their decision to pull fund for the program after just two years. The lack of commitment is often due to the program’s failure to produce quick results, and vice versa, which leads to another reason why programs go inactive: unmet expectations.

*Unattainable expectations* is a major reason local programs become inactive. When a community looks into applying to the Main Street program, they have problem they believe Main Street can easily fix. They see that many communities around them are solving their economic problems with the Main Street program and think it will work

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<sup>110</sup> See Note 62 above.

the same for them. This is the first step in the wrong direction. Each community is different and though their problems seem similar on the surface, what is occurring behind the scenes is usually quite different. Consequently, the results achieved through a Main Street program will vary widely so it is important that a community set goals that are realistic and achievable over the life of the program.

Communities can misjudge expectations in a couple of different ways. One is by taking on too large of a program scope or setting goals too high for the resources it has available and inhibits their ability to be successful. The other is to not take a less comprehensive approach to the program and only show progress in a few areas. Either case will produce results that are out of synch with the participants desired results. For example, a community may focus their efforts on either physical improvements or promotions and feel that should be enough. By improving a storefront and promoting the businesses will not always bring the customers. The business may also need assistance in accounting, or it may not be the right business for the market area.

Abington, Pennsylvania is a good example of both. They tried to stretch the responsibilities of the program manager between two geographically separate and distinct business corridors, which limited their effectiveness. Also, even though the participating business owners stated their goals were for promotion, recruitment of new businesses and retention of existing business, the program focused most of their efforts on physical improvements. This disjointed approach did not provide businesses with the right type of assistance they needed. So, while the area began to look better, the business

owners did not achieve the big improvement in business climate they had expected.<sup>111</sup>

### **Local, State, and National Program Relationships and Interactions**

While the previous theories for a community going inactive can take place at anytime, one cannot help but wonder what the state and national offices were doing to help them. Was there an open channel between the local office where problems and frustrations could be aired and dealt with? Was the state program able to provide sufficient help when needed? Could the involvement of the state or national program have affected the outcome in the end?

The majority of the responsibility for developing a local program falls to the community participants, not the state office. The state program's role is to offer guidance, information and some level of assistance to the localities but not do everything for them. The weaker programs, which are those that tend to go inactive, leave the program with the perception that the state office was not supporting them in the manner they needed. As a result, many of these local programs did not maintain a close, positive relationship with the state office. This led to poor communications and the state not being as aware as it should have been when a community was having problems.

State and national programs are most helpful when they can provide high levels of technical assistance based on the community's particular needs. While the depth of expertise does not appear to be a problem, both state offices recognize that they are understaffed and unable to reach all communities in the program equally.<sup>112</sup> Some of these programs may have needed their hand held through the bad times but the state

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<sup>111</sup> See Note 89 Above.

<sup>112</sup> See Summary Results of State Program Findings on Page 14.

programs could not provide that level of support so communities were left to solve their own problems.

The National Trust Main Street Center has minimal direct contact with the local programs, probably due to the large number of them. However, depending on the state program, NTMSC may be contracted with to provide formal training to the local programs. This is true in Oklahoma where there is a clear relationship between the state and national offices. Since Pennsylvania does not maintain a close relationship with the NTMSC or contract with them to provide services, local communities have no sense of association with the national program. Regardless, the national program would have not played a major role in the local decision, in either state, to become inactive.

### **Summary of Findings**

While there are many reasons why local main street programs “fail,” this analysis identified five main issues: structure, funding, program flexibility, commitment, and too high expectations. As shown in the chart below, the key deciding factor(s) may have been different in each community, but all five factors played a part. (See Table 10: Degree in Which the Major Causes Influenced Decision in Each Community by State Below) While the state programs were a contributing cause of some of these decisions, given the proper level of resources they may have been able to prevent some communities from leaving the program. The next section contains recommendations for communities, state programs, and the national program to improve Main Street and reduce the frequency with which communities leave the program prematurely.

		Major Causes of Preventing Success as a Main Street				
State	City	Structure	Funding	Malleability	Commitment	Unmet Expectations
Oklahoma	Automobile Alley	Moderate	Strong	Strong	Moderate	Moderate
	Sand Springs	Strong	Strong	Strong	Moderate	Strong
	Chickasha	Weak	Strong	Weak	Strong	Strong
Pennsylvania	5th and Lehigh	Unknown	Strong	Strong	Unknown	Unknown
	Abington	Strong	Strong	Strong	Weak	Strong
	Mansfield	Weak	Strong	Weak	Moderate	Moderate

*Table 10: Degree in Which the Major Causes Influenced Decision in Each Community by State*

## **Chapter 5: Recommendations**

With the objective of improving the quality of a community's experience with the Main Street program, reducing their chances of becoming inactive and challenging the state and national offices to become more accountable to these marginalized programs, I offer the following recommendations.

### **Recommendations for Communities**

The Main Street program begins and ends at the local level. A community is deemed to be successful in the program if they achieve high reinvestment statistics as compared to others in the program. Many elect to participate in the Main Street program because of the positive results experienced by other Main Street communities as well as the opportunity to receive free state level support. However, this does not guarantee success, as evidenced by the inactive communities in this study. These recommendations are directed toward those communities that are looking into the program or are deciding whether or not to leave the program.

The most important and first step before applying to the Main Street program is to research the requirements associated with being in the program and understand whether it is a good fit with the community, its revitalization needs, and its capacities. What results does the community want to achieve? What kind of funding does it require? What are the numbers of volunteers that will be needed? Whom would the potential local partnerships be between? What would the structure of the organization be? It is also important to see the program as a long-term commitment and that all those involved understand that many of the major results will probably not occur within the first 5 years. The programs analyzed here went inactive in less than five years.

An assessment of the community's strengths and weaknesses is also part of researching the potential of the program within their community. It can greatly influence the decision whether to Main Street will help and provide insight into the eventual outcome of the program. For example, if the community has a difficulty in acquiring funds to sustain the program long-term, maybe the program should be postponed until more funding opportunities can be identified and allocated. This review of the community and the needs of the program may also find that the Main Street program is not the best economic development tool for revitalizing their downtown. The Main Street program is just one of many economic development opportunities and tools available to communities. Business Associations, Chambers of Commerce, private and non-profit consulting firms, and local governments can also fill this community need and produce similar results with fewer restrictions.

To minimize organization control conflicts, if the local government is to play a prominent role in the program, it should share control in partnership with other community-based groups like the Chamber of Commerce. An independent non-partisan organization is the ideal structure under which to organize. This will provide the needed structure to acquire a variety of funding opportunities and volunteers.

As for those already in the Main Street program experiencing difficulty, they too can benefit from a review of their needs in conjunction with an assessment of their strengths and weaknesses. Once this is completed, a comparison to successful programs as well as those that have gone inactive, may provided much needed insight into what corrective actions are necessary. The Main Street Board of Directors and committees should devise a plan to address these weaknesses. The program director should also play

a role, especially if the Board is part of the problem. Most of all local programs should not hesitate to contact the state office about the issues and concerns they are having within the community. They may have a solution or can forward them to another community that successfully dealt with a similar issue. Being in the Main Street program provides a built in national network of programs. If a resolution to their main issues is not easily identifiable or obtainable, then the program should possibly take a hiatus and regroup at a future time. Other interested groups can sustain certain events or activities if there is any interest.

### **Recommendations for State Programs**

The two state programs in this analysis are different in many ways, but have at least one thing in common: they are controlled through the allocation of state funds. If the state legislatures should ever decide that they are not getting an adequate return on their investment in this program, they could cut funding for the program, which has happened in a few states. This makes it even more important for state Main Street offices to understand why communities have gone inactive and what they might do to prevent future occurrences.

Findings of this study would suggest that in order to better understand shortcomings in the program, a more thorough review and analysis of inactive and struggling local programs should be undertaken by the state Main Street programs. They should measure both qualitative and quantitative measures in order to get a more complete picture of these communities, similar to this research. While some states are beginning this process, most have not so to conduct the assessment in the near future would not duplicate other efforts. It would be my recommendation that an outside group



to help ensure an unbiased assessment but if this is not possible the state office is also capable. Based on the findings of the state analyses, recommendations as to changes in either the national or state programs should be made and implemented.

In the meantime, steps should be taken by the state offices to take immediate action to rescue those local programs that may be in jeopardy. To do this, the recommendation is to:

- ◆ Right-size Resources to Provide Higher Quality Program

- Graduate the most successful local programs in order to reduce the total number of participant communities. This will free up resources that the state office can then reallocate to those in greater need and conduct the recommended assessment, if not out-sourced.

- ◆ Be More Selective

- Assess the correct number of participants based on the improved support levels and available resources, and manage to that number.
- Provide more pre-program assessment and preparation assistance prior to admitting a community to the program.

- ◆ Improve Communications

- Make more frequent contact with local program participants, beyond just the program manager, and conduct more on-site visits for a first-hand assessment.
- ◆ Take Immediate Corrective Action
  - When a potential local program failure is identified, take a more aggressive approach toward ensuring their survival. Work with them to reassess their program, revise the program plan, and institute necessary changes as quickly as possible.
  - If there is no possible solution for the continuation of the program then a hiatus should be made available to allow time for the program to reorganize or final decision to be made.

By implementing these immediate steps and assessing the longer-term needs of the current and past “at risk” programs, the state office should be able to improve the overall quality of the program.

### **Recommendations for National Main Street Center**

The National Trust for Historic Preservation’s National Main Street Center is the national structure unifying the many states that participate in the program along with their communities. As such, the NMSC should adopt the recommendation for a state-by-state review of inactive and at-risk communities affiliated with Main Street. With the encouragement and support of the national office, states will be more inclined to follow-

though with the initiative. Past surveys by the NMSC have been focused primarily data on the structure and reinvestment statistics within each state. While it provided useful data, its purpose was primarily to tout the program's successes rather than isolate weaknesses in a state's program. Once the state information is compiled, it can then be shared with all states, which one of the key benefits of a national organization.

The NTMSC should also embark on a review and assessment of its relationship with the state organizations and the relevance of the current program structure and service offerings. In a recent addition of *Main Street News*, Doug Loescher, Director of NTMSC raises the questions of whether not the Main Street Four Point Approach has become obsolete.<sup>113</sup> While he concluded it was not obsolete, it would be worthwhile to survey the states to get their feedback. As part of this survey, particular attention should be given to what improvements and additional services would be advantageous to the states.

A number of communities cited the inability to adapt the program to better fit their needs and address their issues as one of the reasons they left the program. The program requirements were initially designed by the NTMSC and are allowed only minor variations and still remain in the program. Many new program types have been developed and program pilots have been completed but nothing has come from them. Today, there are opportunities for communities that have a population above 50,000 to participate in the program, but the program requirements themselves don't appear to be different than those for smaller communities.

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<sup>113</sup> Douglas Loescher, "Main Street's Elusive Fifth Point," *Main Street News* 209, 2004.

To broaden the program's reach, additional variations and increased flexibility are recommended. It could take on a cafeteria plan approach that would allow the participant to pick from an array of options to customize the program that is right for them. For instance, a smaller less time demanding structure and fewer requirements could allow the program to market its methodology to help the communities who like the structure but what to adopt as a program offered within an already established entity. The goal of Main Street is assist declining historic downtowns, which affects all communities to some degree, and these types of modifications could bring the benefits to a wider audience.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

The Main Street program has proven itself to be a valuable service to many communities across the country. However, a large number of local programs, around 40 percent in the two states focused on in this study, fail to last more than a few years or achieve the reinvestment results that initially interested them in the program. Both the state and nation association offices have largely ignored the question, “Why do communities leave the program prematurely, and what can be done to prevent it?” Using a small sample of inactive programs in two states, this thesis explores both the state and local perceptions of why local communities dropout of the Main Street program each year.

Through careful review and analysis of the data, similarities between these demographically and geographically diverse Main Street programs did emerge; those being a faulty program structure, the lack of funding, the need to have more flexibility, a lack of participant commitment and unrealistic results and expectations. If something could be done to address these critical local program issues at either the state or national level, the quality of the program would improve to the benefit for all community participants while increasing the retention rate greatly.

A number of recommendations were put forward for each program level; community, state and national. For the community, the recommendation was not only to be better prepared but also to ensure that Main Street is truly the right program for their needs. The state recommendation was to take steps at improving the program quality, providing additional services for those communities at risk and undertake a comprehensive study into the question of this thesis. At the national level, they should

support the states in their study, act as the clearinghouse for the findings, while also undertaking their own study into how they might adapt the program, improving their services to the states.

The future of the Main Street program remains bright as seen through the impacts it has made across the country. Nevertheless, the fact remains that it does not work for all places as a structure. However, the philosophy will have lasting impact in the continual preservation of both the tangible and intangible aspects of historic downtowns of America.

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## Appendix A: Questionnaire Recipients and Respondents

	Questionnaire Recipients	Responded
Oklahoma	<b>Oklahoma Main Street Center</b>	
	Linda Stinett, Executive Director	
	Matthew Weaver, Assitant Director	
	Ron Frantz, Architect	X
	Jim Watters, Management Consultant/Urban Coordinator	X
	Alice Johnson, State Program Manager	X
	<b>Automobile Alley</b>	
	Chad Huntington, Ex Main Street Manager	
	John Ritter, Ex Committee Member	
	John Calhoun, Oklahoma City, Planner	
	Meg Salyer, Ex Board Member	X
	<b>Sand Springs</b>	
	Loy Calhoun, City of Sand Springs, City Manager	X
	Ruth Ellen Henry, City of Sand Springs, Ex Main Street Manager	
	Jim Dunlap, City of Sand Springs, Planning Director	
	Andy Templeton, City of Sand Springs, Code Enforcement	
Pennsylvania	<b>Chickasha</b>	
	Steve Chapman, City of Chickasha, Director of Community Development	
	Marylin Feeber, Chamber of Commerce	
	Pat Brooks, First National Bank, President	X
	Phyllis Steelman, Ex Board Member	
	<b>Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development</b>	
	Diana Kerr, State Coordinator	X
	Joe Yarbrough, Southeast Regional Office, Community Development Specialist	X
	Mike Morin, Northeast Regional Office	
	Cindy Campbell, Northeast Regional Office, Economic Development Analyst	X
	<b>Pennsylvania Downtown Center</b>	
	Bill Fontana, Executive Director	
	Ed LeClear	

**5th and Lehigh, Philadelphia**

Guillermo Salas, Hispanic Association of Contractors and Enterprises,  
Executive Director

Juan Gutierrez, HACE, Main Street Coordinator

**Abington**

Burton T. Conway, Abington Township, Township Manager X

Matthew Lahaza, Abington Township, Economic Development Director X

**Mansfield**

Tom Wierbowski, Greater Mansfield Area Chamber of Commerce

Edward Grala, Borough of Mansfield, Ex Manager X

Tom Freeman, Ex Committee Member

## Appendix B: Questionnaire for State Programs

Main Street  
2005 Study of Inactive Communities

### Questionnaire for State Offices

Instructions: Please fill out the following questionnaire to the best of your ability and respond to every question as thoroughly as possible. If you have more information than there is space, please use the space at the end of the questionnaire for additional comments. Your impressions and comments are very important to understand how the Main Street Program operates in your state. **Please mail back your responses in the enclosed envelope by February 21, 2005** to Jennifer Gates 4039 Chestnut St. Apt 215, Philadelphia, PA 19104. Thank you!

#### I. Respondent Information:

Your Name:

Your Title:

May I quote you directly?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

If I have any additional questions, how may I contact you?

A. What assistance do you provide local Main Streets?

B. When did you start working for the state Main Street Office? (month and year)

C. Did you have any experience with the Main Street Program before working for the state office? If yes, please describe.

#### II. State Program Background

A. Year State program began: \_\_\_\_\_

B. What are the main sources of financial backing for the organization?

- a. What does the money fund?
- C. What is structure of the organization?
  - a. What State department are you a part of?
- D. How many employees work for the State Program?
- E. How do you divide the local programs among the staff?
- F. How is the program advertised/promoted?
- G. Do you maintain a website? If so, what is the address?
- H. What types of services do you provide the Main Street business and property owners?
- I. Do you keep track of the impact of the program? (number of volunteers, amount of money invested in the business district, fundraising and promotional activity revenues...) (Please attach any of your reinvestment statistics.)
- J. Currently, how many local main street programs are there in your state?
- K. On average, how long do communities stay active in the Main Street Program?
- L. How many programs in your state have become inactive?

M. What is your application process for accepting new local programs?

a. Who chooses the new programs?

N. How many new applications do you receive a year?

a. How many new programs do you accept a year?

O. What are the state program's strengths?

a. What are the weaknesses?

P. Are there any other programs offered by the Main Street Office? Please identify.

III. National Trust Main Street Center

A. Do the local Main Streets utilize all four points (organization, promotion, design, and economic restructuring) equally? If not, which points are used more and why?

B. Do any staff from the local communities or staff from the state office attend the National Conference?

C. Do you receive or utilize any assistance from the National Trust?

D. What is the relationship between your office and the National Main Street center?

IV. Inactive Local Programs

- A. What would you consider the major factors that led to the closing of these local Main Streets? (Please list and describe in order of importance.)

Inner-city Ex (Automobile Alley, Ok or HACE, Pa):

Rural Ex (Chickasha, Ok or Mansfield, Pa):

Suburban Ex (Sand Springs, Ok or Abington, Pa):

- B. How much of a role did funds play in the decision?

Inner-city Ex (Automobile Alley, Ok or HACE, Pa):

Rural Ex (Chickasha, Ok or Mansfield, Pa):

Suburban Ex (Sand Springs, Ok or Abington, Pa):

- C. What types of assistance/services did they receive from your State Main Street Office?

Inner-city Ex (Automobile Alley, Ok or HACE, Pa):

Rural Ex (Chickasha, Ok or Mansfield, Pa):

Suburban Ex (Sand Springs, Ok or Abington, Pa):

- D. Have the feelings of these inactive local programs towards the Main Street Program changed? Have any of these inactive programs considered rejoining the program?

- V. Other Comments: Please feel free to add additional information about your experience with the Main Street Program.

## Appendix C: Questionnaire for Community Programs

Main Street  
2005 Study of Inactive Communities

### Questionnaire for Community Participants

Instructions: Please fill out the following questionnaire to the best of your ability and respond to every question as thoroughly as possible. If you have more information than there is space, please use the space at the end of the questionnaire for additional comments. Your impressions and comments are very important to understand how the Main Street Program operated in your Community. **Please mail back your responses in the enclosed envelope by February 21, 2005.** Jennifer Gates; 4039 Chestnut St. Apt 215; Philadelphia, PA 19104. Thank you!

#### I. Respondent Information:

Main Street Community:

Your Name:

Would it be alright to directly quote you?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

If I have any additional questions, how may I contact you?

#### A. What role did you serve within the local Main Street?

\_\_\_\_\_ Board of Directors

\_\_\_\_\_ Officer

\_\_\_\_\_ Program Manager

\_\_\_\_\_ Committee Chairperson

\_\_\_\_\_ Committee Member- Committee Name \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Staff- Title \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Volunteer

\_\_\_\_\_ Other (please identify) \_\_\_\_\_

#### B. When did you start participating in the local program? (month and year)

- C. When did you stop participating in the program? (month and year)
- D. Why did you choose to participate in the Main Street Program?
- E. What other local economic development organizations have you participated in your community? Please list and briefly describe their purpose.

II. Local Program Background

- A. Date Active: \_\_\_\_\_ Date Inactive: \_\_\_\_\_
- B. Who first brought the Main Street Program to the Community's attention and when? (Business owner, city official or personnel, chamber member, etc)
- C. Why did they think it would be beneficial to the Community?
- D. How did you research the applicability of the program to your Community?
- E. What were the main sources of financial backing for the organization?
- F. What was structure of the organization?
- G. What was the size of the Main Street Area? (Number of blocks?)
- H. How many businesses were incorporated in the area? How many or what percentage participated in the program?
- I. How was the program advertised/promoted to the Community?
- J. Did you maintain a website? Is it still accessible? If so, what is the address?



K. What types of services did you provide the Main Street business and property owners?

L. Did you keep track of the impact of the program? (Number of volunteers, amount of money invested in the business district, fundraising and promotional activity revenues...)

M. In a given year, how many people participated in the following roles and what was their tenure?

	No.	Tenure
Board of Directors	_____	_____
Officers	_____	_____
Committee Chairpersons	_____	_____
Volunteers	_____	_____
Other _____	_____	_____

N. Rank the following interested parties by the number of individuals that participated. (1=fewest active participants, 7= most active participants)

- \_\_\_\_\_ Main Street area property owners
- \_\_\_\_\_ Main Street area business owners
- \_\_\_\_\_ Main Street area employees
- \_\_\_\_\_ Private citizens
- \_\_\_\_\_ Elected officials
- \_\_\_\_\_ City Government staff
- \_\_\_\_\_ Other interested parties (please identify) \_\_\_\_\_

### III. Leadership

B. What was the job of the Board of Directors?

- a. How often did they meet?
- C. What kind of experience and expertise did the Board of Directors have?
  - a. What were their strengths?
  - b. What were their weaknesses?
- D. What was the job of the Program Manager?
  - a. Who hired and paid the Manager?
  - b. Was the position full or part-time?
- E. What kind of experience and expertise did the Program Manager(s) have?
  - a. What were their strengths?
  - b. What were their weaknesses?
- F. How many Program Managers were employed during the tenure of the Program? Did this have an impact on the Program?
- G. Was there any other support staff? If so, how many? Volunteer or paid? Part-time or full-time?
- H. What was the job of the Committees?
  - a. How often did they meet?

I. What kind of experience and expertise did the Committees have?

a. What were their strengths?

b. What were their weaknesses?

IV. Volunteers

A. How did the program recruit volunteers?

B. What kind of projects did volunteers work on?

C. Did the number of volunteers decrease, increase, or remain the same during the life of the program? Why?

D. What type of people volunteered? Age range? Occupations?

V. Community/Municipal Involvement

A. What was the economic status of the Community before Main Street?

B. What other major economic development activities did your Community participate in before Main Street?

a. During Main Street?

C. What was Main Street's purpose compared to the other economic development activities?

D. What were the major active entities working with the Main Street area before the Main Street Program?

a. During Main Street?

E. Of the entities above, which were most involved/supportive with Main Street Program activities?

VI. Support

A. What did your Community expect to achieve from the Main Street Program?

B. What did you believe the long-term impacts would be?

a. Were these expectations realized and how?

C. What would you consider the major factors that led to the closing of the local Main Street? (Please list and describe in order of importance.)

D. How much of a role did funds play in the decision?

E. Have the feelings towards the Main Street Program changed? Would you consider becoming a Main Street program again?

VII. State Services

A. What types of assistance/services did you receive from your State Main Street Office?

B. What types of assistance/services did you find to be the most beneficial?

a. Least beneficial?

C. Did the quality of the assistance meet with your expectations? How can they be improved?

VIII. National Trust Main Street Center

A. Did the local Main Street utilize all four points (organization, promotion, design, and economic restructuring) equally? If not, which points were used more and why?

B. Did anyone from the Community go to the National Conference?

C. Did you receive or utilize any assistance from the National Trust?

IX. Current Activities

A. What economic development tools have been implemented since the closing of the Main Street Program?

B. How has the business district environment changed?

C. Have the current economic conditions of the downtown worsened, improved, or remained the same?

D. Are there any elements of the Main Street Program that have remained and are being carried out by other entities? If so, please describe.

X. Other Comments: Please feel free to add additional information about your community and your experience with the Main Street Program.

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